

STORY LIGHT TUCHIHI
ILLUS. Saori Toyota

2



VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



**SEIYA
RYUUGUIN**

The overly cautious hero
summoned by Rista.

MITIS

The drop-dead gorgeous
Goddess of Archery. While
she seems pure...

RISTARTE

A novice goddess
who summons Seiya
to save Gaeabrande.

VALKYRIE

The Goddess of Destruction.
Enjoys painting.



ARIADOA

A seasoned goddess.
Watches over
Rista and Seiya.

ADENELA

She may not look like
a deity, but she's the
Goddess of War. She's
also in love with Seiya.

CERCEUS

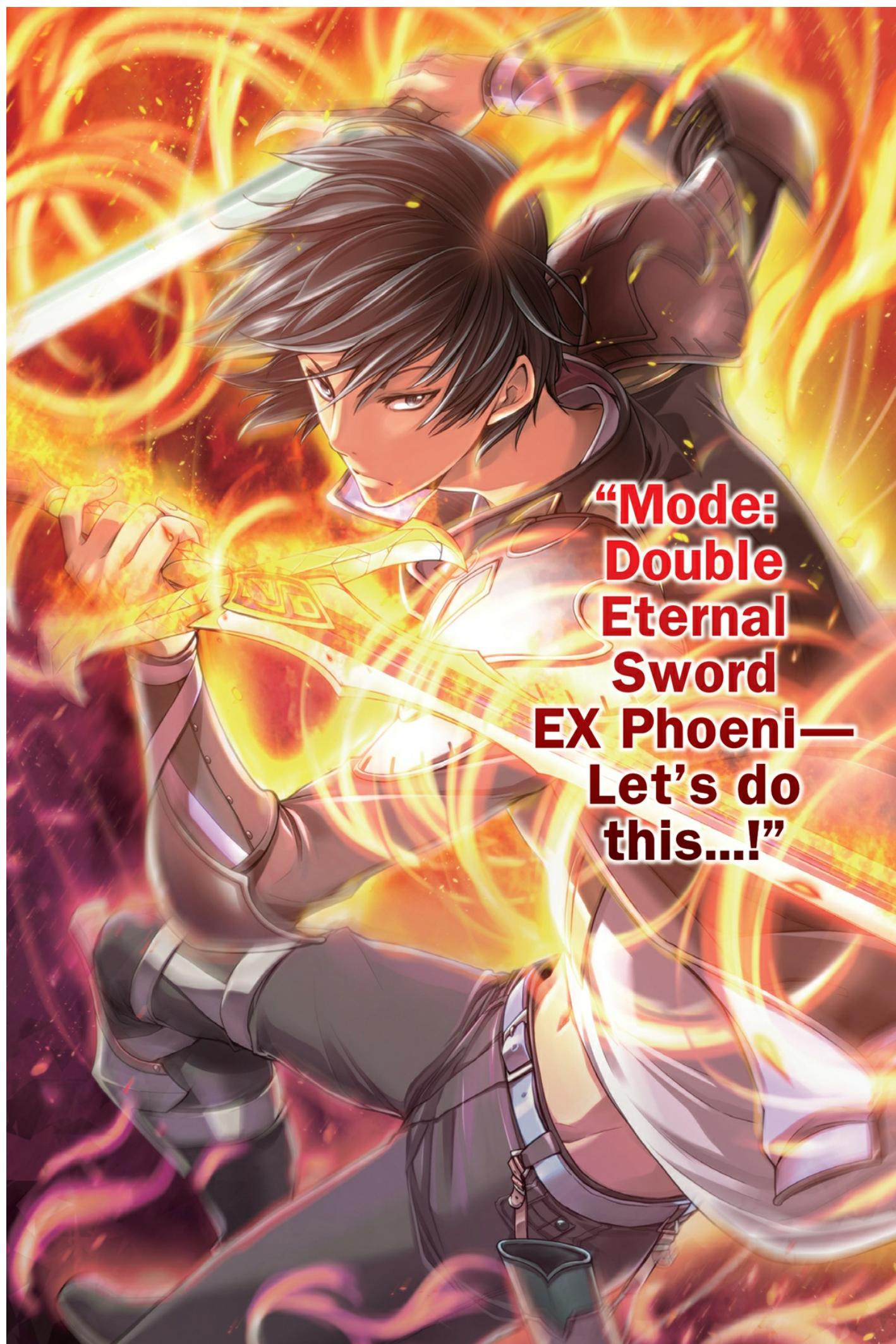
The muscle-bound Divine
Blade. Actually mentally weak.
He enjoys baking cakes.

WOHLKS ROSEGUARD

The emperor. He's said to be
the strongest warrior in all of
Gaeabrande.

ROSALIE ROSEGUARD

The daughter of the emperor.
She fights to protect the
country.



**“Mode:
Double
Eternal
Sword
EX Phoeni—
Let’s do
this...!”**

THE HERO IS
OVERPOWERED
BUT
OVERLY CAUTIOUS

STORY

LIGHT TUCHIHI

ILLUS.

SAORI TOYOTA

2

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TRANSLATION BY MATT RUTSOHN

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Reverse Fireworks

I readily agreed to assist the imperial knights, who came scurrying for help after being attacked by the Demon Lord's special forces, as one would expect from a goddess. However, what I really want to do is relax. Even Mash and Elulu of the dragonkin look exhausted, and I don't blame them. After all, we just finished fighting the Great Mother, Queen of the Dragons. I turn my gaze to Seiya Ryuuguuin, the overly cautious Hero I summoned, to see how he is doing.

Yep. Just as I thought. Even Seiya's exhaus— Hmm? W-wait... He doesn't actually look that tired... I mean, I guess he looks sort of tired when I squint? Wait. No. I think it's just my imagination... Ugh, I don't even know anymore with that guy. As always, the Hero's expression lacks emotion.

"Allow us to take you all to Olga Fortress!"

With great enthusiasm, the soldiers begin rushing over to their horses waiting nearby. However...

"That won't be necessary."

After stopping, Seiya sends me a look.

"It's an emergency. Open a gate. We'll take a shortcut to the fortress."

"W-we can't! Besides, I don't even know where Olga Fortress is! I'm not allowed to create a gate to a place I've never been without getting Great Goddess Ishtar's permission!"

Seiya's expressionless glare is reminiscent of a Japanese Noh mask.

Wh-what's his problem?! I bet he thinks I simply *can't do it!* It's written all over his face!

However, the next words Seiya mutters defy imagination.

"A dead light bulb... An empty bottle... Dust beneath a table... All those things

make me think of you, Rista.”

“...?! All those things are garbage!”

Nevertheless, Seiya turns to the soldier as if he’s given up.

“You said the fortress was due north-northeast, right? Exactly how far are we talking?”

“It wouldn’t take more than an hour on horseback!”

“That’s not far at all. Let’s fly.”

Thereupon, Seiya’s body begins floating in the air, and the soldiers let out gasps of admiration.

“My God! The Hero can fly!”

“I can’t believe I’m seeing a human fly! The Hero really is on another level!”

“Now this is someone who can defeat Beel Bub!”

“...‘Beel Bub’? The hell is a ‘Beel Bub’?”

The moment Mash asks, the soldiers clench their teeth through grim expressions.

“It’s a monster that looks like a giant fly! Its army has been periodically attacking Olga Fortress, causing numerous casualties!”

“...So it’s going to be an aerial battle.”

With a finger on his chin while floating in the air, Seiya appears to be pondering something, but...

“First, we need to confirm the enemy’s position. Mash, you come with me. Rista, you take Elulu.”

“All right.”

After using Order, I receive Great Goddess Ishtar’s permission to manifest my white wings before taking Elulu’s hand. Seiya grabs Mash’s hand as well.

“Master! Are you sure?!”

“We have no other choice. Don’t let go.”

“You got it! I can’t believe I get to fly with you! I’m so pumped!”

Mash explodes with childlike joy as they take to the sky. With Elulu at my side, I follow along as we head toward Olga Fortress, leaving the soldiers behind.

After ten or so minutes spent following the superspeedy Seiya, Elulu pipes up.

“Hey, Ristie! What’s that?”

I notice a black cluster up ahead in the sky.

“Maybe it’s a rain cloud?”

At least, that’s what I think while gazing at it from afar. However, the closer I get, the clearer it becomes. It looks like a large cloud of black *things* gathering together.

“Um... That isn’t a rain cloud! That’s... That’s a swarm of flies! It’s the enemy!”

The hundreds of flies each appear to be roughly the size of a human as they vibrate their transparent wings and hover in the air. The collective sound of their horrid buzzing can be heard from relatively far away.

“Yuck! That’s so gross!”

Elulu’s hand begins trembling as she holds my arm. Slightly ahead, Seiya turns around and looks at us.

“Rista, we’re descending.”

“O-okay!”

Seiya swiftly descends into the vast forest below, and I immediately follow.

After arriving in the woods, Seiya hides in the trees while looking at the enemies far away in the sky. His eyes become even sharper as he stares at the swarm. He appears to be using Scan.

“Each fly exceeds level thirty. There are around three to four hundred of them. This may end up being worse than the army of the ten thousand undead depending on how you look at it.”

Seiya is spot-on with his analysis. A few hundred swift, airborne, high-level enemies is perhaps a far greater threat than an army of slow-moving undead.

“Let’s continue watching them for now.”

“Good idea.”

But as we turn our solemn gazes to the sky...

“Hff! ...Blaarf! ...Uweeeh!”

With his hand on a nearby tree, Mash starts barfing all over the trunk directly in front of him, returning the nutrients to nature. Elulu gently rubs his back.

“A-are you okay, Mash?”

“Mm...! I—I feel sick...! *Bllp...!*”

I guess he got motion sickness from his flight with Seiya. I know how he feels, though—painfully so, because the same thing happened to me once before. It was a miserable plight. Seiya, on the other hand...

“Yeah, flies are disgusting.”

It seems he misread what Mash was trying to convey.

He isn’t throwing up because of the flies. You made him sick...!

Everyone is thinking the same thing, but no one can bear to mention it while the Hero is staring down the enemy so intensely. That’s when, out of nowhere, a massive, earsplitting explosion erupts from above!

“Kneel before me, humans! You are no match for the devastating power of my Aerial Assault Flies!”

I peer into the sky to see the source of the colossal voice, which could even be heard from lands far, far away. It was different from all the other flies. Because of my supreme vision, which surpasses that of a human, I can easily tell that it’s a monster. While it has the face of a fly, it stands on two feet. Its multiple large red eyes are the size of a fist, and its hands remind me of pointed scissors. It is more than obvious that this irregular monster is the leader of this swarm. I use Scan to check the enemy’s stats just like Seiya did.

BEEL BUB

LV: 76

HP: 18,963

MP: 8,751

ATK: 7,877

DEF: 5,969

SPD: 487,562

MAG: 883

Resistance: Fire, Water, Ice, Lightning, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Status Ailments

Special Abilities: Evade (LV: MAX), Flight (LV: MAX)

Skills: Acid Spit, Rolling Dodge

Personality: Cruel

It doesn't appear to be one of the four generals, and its stats aren't even that impressive...or so I thought. I take another look at Beel Bub's speed. It wasn't just my imagination.

"Wh-what is up with its speed?! It's in a completely different league!"

"Unbelievable..."

Even Seiya gasps for a change.

"How can it talk with a face like that? Where are its speech organs?"

"Who cares?! Look at its speed stat!"

"H-hey, Ristie, Seiya! Look over there! It looks like the Roseguard soldiers are trying to attack it!"

Squinting, Elulu points not at the sky but at the surface. On a faraway plain stands a group of archers, preparing to shoot the airborne enemies. Beel Bub seems to notice as well, but the monster doesn't run away. In fact, the swarm of flies decreases its altitude.

"Come on, give me your best shot! I even lowered myself so your arrows could reach."

Arrows pour into the sky like inverted rain, all closing in on the smug leader. It's a brilliant, unified attack. However...the enemy's formation remains stalwart. Even watching from afar, it is clear the archers' attack doesn't reduce the enemy forces in the least.

Seiya mutters:

"It's not just Beel Bub. The other massive flies seem to have high evasion as well. It doesn't look like a single arrow connected."

Once the barrage of arrows comes to an end, the flies instantly descend and begin attacking the soldiers. The archers who fail to escape are captured by the flies' six legs like prey. Then the flies immediately ascend into the firmament once more until they're around fifty meters high. After coming to a complete stop with the soldiers in their arms, Beel Bub bellows: "It is time! Today we will be having yet another *reverse fireworks display*!"

R-reverse fireworks?! Don't tell me...

The bad feeling I have becomes a reality. Beel Bub gives the order to the giant flies to release the soldiers at once, and in the blink of an eye, gravity hurls them straight to the ground. Elulu looks away while Mash clenches his teeth. Beel Bub, on the other hand, sounds amused.

"Ah, the view from up here is truly superb. Just fantastic. Brains and intestines gushing out; beautiful bloody flowers, all in full bloom, spreading across the ground! It's a shame you all can't see it—since you're all dead!"

After the cruel joke, Beel Bub strains its voice even more.

"What is taking the Hero so long?! Someone, bring me the Hero! This massacre will not end until I end him!"

By my side, Seiya calmly mutters to himself.

"This was all done to lure me out..."

"Master, I can't wait anymore! Let's get him!"

As Mash hastily assumes a battle-ready stance, Seiya holds him with a hand on his shoulder.

"Calm down, Mash. You can't underestimate flies. They can move faster than

we can blink. Plus, they're monsters in this world, which means they can probably move faster than we can even imagine. I sent out three Automatic Phoenixes to confirm, and they were almost instantly destroyed."

"Y-you mean those powerful firebirds?!"

"Yeah. And that fly is asking for the Hero, despite knowing that I have already killed two of the Demon Lord's generals. In other words, it has complete confidence in its ability to fight in the air. We can't approach it without a plan, so just focus on observing the enemy for now."

Beel Bub boisterously buzzes as if it were roaring with laughter, satisfied with the human fireworks.

"Bzzz, bzzz, bzzz!"

It then takes its army and disappears into the northern sky.

We leave the forest after the enemy is out of sight. Then we slowly walk toward the large fortress we can see up ahead. Olga Fortress's sturdy outer walls are made of brick, but it's damaged here and there due to the enemy's attacks. But the real tragedy is what happened on the plains around the fortress. It's hard to even look.

"Elulu, get behind me."

"Okay..."

I watch out for Elulu. Seeing the dead bodies on the ground—or what remained of them—would be a sight far too gruesome for a young girl. Once soldiers, they became "reverse fireworks" that were dropped from dozens of meters up in the air and reduced to puddles of blood and viscera. It's hard to believe that these terribly mutilated husks used to belong to living human beings. I also catch glimpses of corpses that appear to have been dissolved by the flies' acid spit.

Elsewhere in this vision of hell is a soldier kneeling in prayer in a pool of blood. As if having taken note of our approach, the figure glances in our direction. Wearing armor with golden inlays, the soldier's eyes open wide at the sight of the white wings on my back.

“At last... You have come...!”

The soldier removes her helmet to reveal long azure hair. While beautiful, her face shows unyielding determination.



Olga Fortress

“Men! The time has come! The Hero and goddess are here to save the world!”

The azure-haired knight raises her sword into the air and yells to her allies, who are completely fatigued from battle.

“Now, on your feet! We must invade their nest!”

However, she is the only one filled with such passion. A white-bearded, elderly soldier advises: “Madam Rosalie! Please calm down! We need to return to the fortress and regroup!”

“Are you mad?! The time has come to avenge our fallen comrades!”

“Please, open your eyes! The only soldiers left are exhausted! They are in no shape to fight!”

Rosalie looks around at the wounded warriors. Then, as if she has finally come to face reality, she groans before falling into a deep silence.

“We have lost many men, so I understand your eagerness to exact your vengeance. However, the Hero has only just arrived. I feel it would be rude to immediately drag him off like that...”

Rosalie turns her gaze to Seiya and me. Although different from Seiya’s, her eyes bear sharp insight as well. After a few moments, Rosalie nods softly, seeming calm.

“You’re right, Carlo. Let’s return to the fortress. There, we will hold a meeting with the Hero and come up with a plan to get rid of the flies.”

The elderly soldier looks relieved, but Rosalie almost immediately reiterates her unyielding determination.

“However, after the meeting, we will head to the enemy’s territory! Today!

Do I make myself clear?”

Rosalie spins around in an exaggerated manner, then strides alone toward the fortress.

As Carlo lets out a sigh, I turn to him and ask:

“Um... About that knight...Rosalie... Who is she?”

“She is the captain of the guard for the Olga Fortress.”

Elulu’s face instantly lights up.

“She’s a captain! A female captain...! She has wonderful azure hair, she’s tall, and she’s so beautiful!”

Elulu’s right. Rosalie has a certain dignified charm about her.

“She is beautiful, isn’t she? Not only her appearance but she has this certain... mysterious aura.”

We chat with Carlo as we walk to the fortress. The soldiers behind us converse while sluggishly moving forward as well. That’s when...

“What are you doing?! There’s no time! Hurry!”

Rosalie looses a terrible roar as she waits up ahead. Thereupon, everyone zips their lips and picks up the pace until they reach the fortress...

Mash is awestruck the moment we cross under the gate attached to the outer wall.

“This place is huge...!”

Olga Fortress looks almost no different than a giant castle. There are watchtowers, wells for prolonged battles, and storage areas for food. Carlo cheerfully grins.

“Olga Fortress was originally used as a station on the border, after all. Along with its robust outer wall, there are also archers placed at the top of the fortress. In addition, there are living quarters that can house a few hundred soldiers.”

While the elderly soldier speaks proudly of the fortress, Seiya simply lets out a “hmph.”

“Doesn’t look like it’ll be hard for the enemy to break through, judging by what just happened outside, though.”

“Y-yes, you are correct. Currently, we have no way of defending ourselves against Beel Bub’s flying army.”

“Carlo, won’t the empire itself be in danger if the flies get past the border?”

“Their objective is to lure out the Hero. Therefore, they will not go any farther than this border. In the remote chance they do decide to go to the empire of Roseguard, the imperial mage of lightning, Flashika, will be there. Lightning spells are very effective against flying enemies.”

“Oh, so there’s a powerful mage stationed in the empire itself. In that case, why don’t we call him over here?”

“Flashika is the only person in the empire who can use high-level lightning magic. If he comes to the fortress, then the imperial capital will lose its greatest defense against airborne assault. We cannot afford to have him leave.”

While following Carlo to the meeting room, Seiya argues:

“Even if this mage is as powerful as you say, I’d bet that the Demon Lord’s army could easily crush your empire if they wanted to.”

Ack... He just says whatever’s on his mind, doesn’t he?

But when thinking back about how powerful the two generals Seiya fought were, I can’t help but feel that he’s right. However, Carlo replies with absolute calm: “The empire will not fall.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because Roseguard has the Warmaster on our side.”

“The ‘Warmaster’?”

Mash suddenly chimes in.

“Oh, I’ve heard about him! He’s Roseguard’s emperor and the strongest warrior in the world! They say his sword can cut through the heavens and slice open the planet!”

“I doubt it. If that were true, then you wouldn’t need me to save the world.

They're baseless rumors. They were probably circulated to give people the illusion that their country is safe."

Carlo softly shakes his head in response to Seiya's analysis.

"Not at all. Other than the Hero, the emperor is undoubtedly the strongest warrior in the world. The empire will not waver as long as he rules Roseguard."

Wh-what confidence...! The Warmaster must be really strong!

"However, just like with Flashika, the emperor has his reasons for not leaving the capital."

Just when I want to ask Carlo what that reason is, he starts walking into the building in the center of the fortress.

"We're here. This is the meeting room where we come up with battle strategies. I believe Madam Rosalie is already waiting inside."

The moment the elderly knight opens the door, I hear the bitter voices of a man and a woman arguing.

"Madam Rosalie! How many times do I have to tell you not to go to the front line of battle! You are the next successor to the throne!"

"That's exactly why I stand on the front! True warriors do not fear battle! Just like my father, I will stand before the soldiers, fight, and raise the morale of our army!"

"Then at least bring me, your assistant Bhat, with you! How would I ever explain myself to the emperor if something were to happen to you?!"

I finally understand why I felt Rosalie was different when I hear her argue with the muscular warrior Bhat. She is the daughter of Roseguard's emperor and will become the empress who rules over Roseguard after her father passes away. No wonder her aura is different than the rest. At any rate, she appears to be quite the tomboy, perhaps due to looking up to her father. After Carlo clears his throat by the door, Rosalie and a few dozen others take seats at the round table before looking this way.

"Everyone, the Hero and his allies have arrived."

Carlo bows deeply to us.

“I will be on my way, then.”

“Thank you, Carlo!”

After Elulu and I thank him, he gently smiles back as he closes the door on his way out. I look ahead once more when...

“Oh...! So this is the Hero and his allies who have come to save us!”

“So that’s the Hero! Simply awe-inspiring!”

Everyone in the room stares at us as if they are overcome with emotion. Seiya’s aura is no less impressive than Rosalie’s. Tall with refined features, anybody could sense there was something special about him.

After being guided to the empty seats around the table, Seiya, Mash, Elulu, and I sit side by side together. I look at each of the people sitting at the round table. Everyone seems to be someone important, which I guess is something you would expect at a meeting to discuss strategy like this. There’s the muscle-bound warrior Bhat with whom Rosalie was just arguing, a mage with a robe decorated with the empire’s emblems, and even an elderly person with a staff. High-ranking officials must have come to Olga Fortress because the successor to the throne is here as well.

Rosalie nudges the slim mage, who then speaks up in a high pitch.

“I would like to begin our meeting with the Hero! Our objective is to defeat the flies!”

But at that very moment, the Hero interjects in a well-projected voice.

“Wait. Before that, I want to ensure my safety.”

“...What?”

“This place is dangerous.”

I can feel the tension among the gathered imperial officials—including Rosalie. Before long, an old man with a beard, who could pass for a sage, asks: “Hero...what exactly do you mean?”

“One of the Demon Lord’s henchmen is probably in disguise and hiding among us.”

“A-are you sure?!”

Those few words from the Hero cause a commotion at the table.

“Well...it’s a possibility at least.”

“O-oh, you were talking about a hypothetical situation...”

Everyone sighs in relief after hearing Seiya clarify things. I poke Seiya in the arm.

“Hey, Seiya, it’s okay. I don’t sense the presence of any monsters here.”

“Hmm... I see. So the Demon Lord’s army isn’t here. However...,” Seiya continues with a solemn expression. “There’s probably an explosive somewhere in the room.”

“A-are you sure?!”

Their relief is short-lived. The officials start panicking again. However...

“Well...it’s a possibility at least.”

Everyone sighs in relief upon hearing that utterance. But Seiya then looks up at the corner of the room with a piercing gaze.

“Both things I said just now were merely speculation. What I really wanted to discuss...is up there. Someone is secretly listening in on our meeting.”

“A-are you sure?!”

Rosalie’s expression instantly changes as if the third time is the charm.

“Hurry! Go investigate the ceiling!”

A couple dozen soldiers head out under Rosalie’s orders.

...Ten minutes later.

“We have returned from our investigation! All twenty-three soldiers searched every inch of the area over this room, but we didn’t find even one speck of dust!”

After the soldier leaves the room, Rosalie and the other officials stare at Seiya with bated breath.

“Well...it was a possibility.”

BAM! All of a sudden, Rosalie violently slams her hand against the table.

“Enough! We will be here all night if we persistently worry about every possibility!”

Rosalie’s face turns bright red as she tells Seiya off in my place.

...Yep. She kind of sounded like a young girl there. It looks like she normally tries to lower her voice to project a certain image. But, well, judging by her appearance, she actually does appear to be around twenty years old—give or take a year.

As if she noticed me watching her with a hint of joy in my eyes, Rosalie reverts to her previous tone and raises her voice to overcompensate.

“W-we don’t need a meeting to discuss strategy! All the Hero and I need to do is take the lead and infiltrate the enemy’s base!”

“Madam Rosalie! That is far too dangerous.”

While the imperial officials try to persuade her to reconsider, Seiya firmly nods in a favorable manner.

“I agree.”

Thereupon, Rosalie sends Seiya a fiery gaze as if having changed her opinion of him.

“The Hero feels the same way I do! Perfect! Then there is no time to waste! We must prepare to attack!”

“Don’t get the wrong idea. I was agreeing that we don’t need a meeting to discuss strategy because I’ve already decided what I’m going to do.”

“A-and what is that?”

A deep silence reigns over the meeting room, and everyone waits for the Hero’s next words with apprehension. A few moments go by before Seiya makes his plans clear as can be.

“I’m leaving.”

““““What?””””

“I am going to return to the unified spirit world and train until I learn a skill

that rivals the enemy's. Now if you will excuse me.”

Mash, Elulu, and I are already used to how Seiya does things, but...

“““Whaaaaaat?!”””

Rosalie and the others turn black in the face as they scream.

Slap

The warrior with a masculine build, Bhat, lets out a bitter laugh when he hears Seiya's response.

"Su-surely, you're joking!"

"I'm not. I'm leaving."

The robed female mage yells:

"You can't! You're just going to abandon us?!"

"I'm leaving, and that's final."

The officials' expressions in reaction to Seiya's stubbornness are a mix of astonishment and sorrow.

I—I have to do something! They probably think his training is going to take days!

I speak up in order to clear the air.

"Please settle down, everyone! It's going to be a very short training session!"

"Exactly. I only need about three days."

Seiya's reply causes each of them to scream individually.

"You're going to be gone for three whole days?!"

"Since when does 'three days' count as 'very short'?!"

"The fortress is going to be in ruins if we wait that long!"

The officials are so taken aback that they yell out in rage one after another. Then, as if realizing they are behaving in an undignified manner, they clear their throats as their faces turn red.

I turn to them and plead:

“P-please listen to me. Three days in the spirit world is barely an hour in your world, so...”

“An hour...? R-really?”

Just as everyone is on the verge of being persuaded, Rosalie, who has been quiet this entire time, makes her voice heard.

“Is training really even necessary? Earlier, I saw white wings on the goddess’s back! The goddess can fly! So we already have a means to attack, do we not?!”

What?! M-me?! What does this girl think she’s saying?!

While I’m taken aback at being suddenly called out, Seiya almost immediately sets forth a counterargument.

“That won’t work. The goddess can only provide backup. She can’t fight.”

S-Seiya...! Thank you so much for standing up for me!

“Besides, she wouldn’t be any help anyway. She can barely float with those wings. She has about as much use as a balloon—or maybe even less than that.”

“...! I can’t believe you! You went too far this time!”

Being told that I am even less useful than a balloon makes me pop with rage, but Seiya simply ignores me as if it’s nothing out of the ordinary.

“By the way, I can fly as well.”

“Oh...! Then...!”

A voice from the round table starts to speak, but...

“But we have no chance of winning like that. Trying to have an aerial battle against the enemy would be the height of stupidity. That’s exactly what they want.”

“Hero, aren’t you being a little too timid? How can you say that without even trying?”

“I carefully observed the enemy before coming here, and its speed is extraordinary.”

Seiya’s casual response causes Rosalie to furrow her eyebrows.

“Wait... Hold on. What did you just say? You were ‘carefully observing’ Beel Bub? Don’t tell me you watched my men get slaughtered from afar and didn’t do anything to stop it.”

Rosalie glares at Seiya fiercely, so I butt in, sensing that things are going south.

“You’ve got the wrong idea! Even if we wanted to save them, it was already too late...!”

Rosalie slams her fist on the table, and I let out a shriek.

“I am not asking whether you saved them or not! I am asking if the Hero saw what happened yet still decided to do nothing!”

Despite Rosalie’s extremely threatening attitude, Seiya manages to maintain his composure.

“You’re saying some pretty strange things. If you can’t save them no matter what you do, then nothing can be done about it.”

“People are dead! They were slaughtered by that monster! What kind of Hero can see that and not feel anything?!”

“How would feeling something change anything exactly? It’s at precisely times like this that you need to remain calm and proceed carefully. You cannot let yourself be influenced by your surroundings, and only when you remain collected can you do what’s truly necessary during crucial moments.”

It is like fire and ice. Two completely opposite personalities like this would never compromise. And eventually, Rosalie’s gaze turns to contempt.

“This man is no good! He is but a fool and only a Hero by name!”

“M-Madam Rosalie! You cannot say such a thing to the Hero!”

“A Hero—by definition—means that you are heroic, but this man is nothing more than a coward!”

Rosalie is exploding with rage, but I find myself becoming slightly annoyed by her.

For some reason, it’s aggravating when someone else says it! Seiya may not

look it, but he puts a lot of thought into his actions! I used to think like Rosalie and get mad at him, but now I know that Seiya's cautiousness is of a completely different nature than cowardice.

"Excuse me, Rosalie! Seiya may be slow to act for a Hero, but we have weathered the storm over and over again thanks to him being so well prepared!"

I look at each member gathered in the meeting room before assuring them: "I promise you that the moment this Hero has finished training and is completely ready to go is the moment that Beel Bub's Aerial Assault Flies will be vanquished!"

The room is overcome with silence. I follow up by saying to Rosalie: "So please...? Just wait an hour for him to train, okay? Rosalie..."

I thought she would just say, *Fine. Do what you must.* But I was naive.

"...Do you honestly expect me to believe you?"

Rosalie is excessively more stubborn than I even imagined.

"I have lost a little over one hundred men to Beel Bub. Do you understand how I feel?"

"O-of course I do! It's painful. It's sad and—"

"A being that transcends humanity can never truly understand the preciousness of human life. According to the legends, goddesses are blessed with eternal life. Am I wrong?"

"W-well, yeah, but..."

"Then stop talking."

Tch...!

As I grind my teeth, Seiya murmurs:

"You have no right to talk about the preciousness of human life, either."

"Excuse me...?"

Rosalie speaks in a deep voice as she scowls. However, as if not to be outdone, Seiya glares back at Rosalie like a hawk.

“Your soldiers weren’t killed by the enemy. You killed them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your lack of planning is what created that mountain of dead bodies.”

“You bastard...! Take that back!”

Rosalie walks all the way over until she is standing right in front of Seiya.

“M-Madam Rosalie?!”

The imperial officials are panicking, but...

“Take that back! Take that back or...!”

Acting on impulse, Rosalie draws her right hand far back without even a moment of hesitation.

Ack! Seiya’s gonna get punched by a girl!

It looks like Rosalie’s right hand connects with Seiya’s cheek, but an instant before she actually hits him, he grabs her arm at a blinding speed. But if anything, what surprises me is what comes next. After fending off her attack, Seiya slowly gets out of his seat, then smacks Rosalie’s cheek with his left hand.

SLAP!

A loud pop echoes throughout the meeting room.

“Ufff?!”

An uncharacteristically strange sound escapes her small mouth. Seiya’s right hand is already in the air, prepared for a counterattack.

“OKAY, THAT’S ENOOOOOOOOOUGH!!”

I slide in between them and start making excuses for Seiya.

“Th-this isn’t what it seems, Rosalie! He thought he was going to get punched, so he naturally countered! It’s basically a conditioned reflex for warriors! Seiya didn’t mean to hurt you!”

I immediately turn around and scold Seiya.

“I don’t care why you did it! You should never hit a girl!”

“But she tried to punch me first. It was self-defense.”

Despite my effort, though, Rosalie’s fury has already reached the point of no return.

“I—I can’t believe you...!”

She pushes me out of the way and throws another right hook at Seiya, but it ends up being a replay of what happened a moment ago.

SLAP!

“Ouch...!”

A high-pitched scream of agony slips between Rosalie’s lips once more. But it’s not over yet.

“Take this...!”

SLAP!

“Ahhhn!”

She lets out an adorable cry...

“Y-you’ll pay for that!”

SLAP!

“Unf!”

She audibly pants...

...I tried sticking up for Seiya by saying it was nothing more than a conditioned reflex and that he meant no harm. Nevertheless, it has come to my attention that nothing about that was reflex, and he definitely did mean to do harm. Seiya is slapping Rosalie as if it were nothing.

Every time she tries to punch his right cheek, he slaps hers before she can, and the left side fares no better, either. Therefore, only Rosalie is getting slapped silly, causing her cheeks to swell like plump red apples. I audibly swallow my saliva in the midst of the dead silence.

At any rate, he has hit her *way* too much! Get with the times, you pig! This isn’t the fifties! Wait... What era is he from anyway?!

I shudder at the fact that the Hero doesn't even have a speck of decency. That's when, with tears rolling down her cheeks and a runny nose, Rosalie suddenly unsheathes her sword.

"I-I'm going to kill you! S-s-say your prayers...!"

"M-M-Madam Rosalie! You can't...!"

"You...*sniffle*...are no...*snort*...Hero!"

"S-S-Seiya!! Apologize to her this instant! I mean, look at her! Can't you see she's crying!"

"I'm not...*sniffle*...crying! Mm...!"

"Seiya! Hurry up and apologize!"

"No. I didn't do anything wrong."

"I didn't ask if you did! Just look at how much she's crying!"

"I told you...I'm not...*hic*...crying...! I'm not...crying...*sniffle*...one bit...!"

"I'm not apologizing. I did nothing wrong."

"You two are acting like children! I don't care who's wrong! Just say you're sorry!"

But neither apologizes. Eventually, Rosalie breaks the silence while still sobbing.

"I've had...enough! I don't...*sniffle*...need any Hero! I'm going...*hic*...to go to the enemy's hideout...by myself!"

Seiya glares at Rosalie as she tries to hold back her tears. Wait... I don't think he's glaring at her. He's using Scan.

I decide to use Scan as well to check Rosalie's stats for future reference.

ROSALIE ROSEGUARD

LV: 23

HP: 6,780

MP: 0

ATK: 4,120

DEF: 3,655

SPD: 3,987

MAG: 0

GRW:

48

Resistance: Fire, Water, Dark, Poison, Paralysis

Special Abilities: Light's Blessing (LV: 3)

Skills: Knocking Sword

Personality: Impulsive

She has very high stats for a human, but...they aren't that impressive compared to those of the flies.

Seiya then says:

"You're the so-called Warmaster's daughter, so I thought you'd be at least halfway decent, but...*sigh*. Your attributes are painfully mediocre. You'd die a meaningless death if you attacked their base like this."

Just then...

"Grrr...!"

Grunting, Rosalie's face turns as red as a tomato. She shakes her disheveled azure hair as the mountainous tears fall ceaselessly to the floor. Rosalie then begins quivering as she tightly clenches her fists.

...Ack! I've never seen someone get this angry before!

From my side, Elulu shrieks:

"S-something isn't right! Rosalie's growling like a dog!"

"Just ignore her, Elulu. She'll bite you if you get too close."

"Grrrrrr...!"

As the captain of the guard growls even more after being insulted, Mash anxiously pokes Seiya's arm.

“M-Master Seiya...! Maybe apologizing would be for the best...?”

“I’d rather die. More importantly, we should be going now. Rista, create the gate.”

“Ah... O-okay...”

I create a gate because it seems like things are only going to get worse here. But even then, I can still hear Rosalie behind me...

“Grrr...! Grrrrr! *Grooow!*!”

Sh-she won’t stop growling! She really is acting like a dog! I almost want to put a muzzle on her and give her belly rubs until she calms down.

“A-anyway, we’ll be back in an hour! So don’t go anywhere, okay?! That means you, too, Rosalie! Sit! Stay!”

And just like that, we turn around and return to the unified spirit world, despite the fact that Rosalie looks like she could bite us at any moment.

The Goddess Who Lives in the Forest

“Listen, can you stop doing that? That’s no way for a Hero to act...or anyone for that matter. I mean, I get that it was her fault, but...”

I waste no time after getting back to the unified spirit world to lecture Seiya. Meanwhile, Seiya doesn’t look like he even cares what I have to say...

“Seiya, you were really scary back there...”

“Yeah...those were some insane slaps...”

Being reprimanded by Elulu and Mash, Seiya stares hard at his hand, then clenches his teeth with a bitter expression.

“Before I even realized it, I was hitting her. Just looking at her annoys me.”

“...Seiya?”

I’m kind of surprised. While he’s high-handed and has a filthy mouth, he never shows much emotion in front of others.

“Even the way she thinks pisses me off. She recklessly tries to move forward, despite having no chance of winning...and without even considering how many will die because of it.”

Rosalie’s reckless personality is the complete opposite of Seiya’s cautious nature. That’s probably why he’s so angry.

“At any rate, how about taking a short rest?”

I don’t think suddenly training with this much tension is ideal, so I offer Seiya some time to calm down, but...

“No, that won’t be necessary. I want to start training.”

His frown from moments ago is nowhere to be found. He’s absolutely calm, as if nothing happened.

How can he bounce back so quickly like that?!

“I knew it! Seiya, you’re such a good person!”

Seiya seems to be confused as to why Elulu is smiling at him.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you’re training to save Rosalie! That makes you a good person!”

“I’m not doing it for her. I’m doing it because I was apparently called to your world to save it.”

Hmm... Seiya isn’t all sunshine and rainbows, but he’s really dedicated when it comes to things like this. He has a strong sense of justice...and he doesn’t let personal feelings get in the way.

Seiya pushes back his glossy, black hair.

“I already know which deity I need to train with to defeat the flies.”

“Oh, really? I can introduce you if it’s someone I know! Just tell me who it is!”

“Bring me the god of missiles.”

“The god of...? There is no missile god!”

“Fine. I’ll settle for the god of guns.”

“There...might be a god like that, but Gaeabrande isn’t that kind of world...”

“If it means defeating the enemy, then who cares?”

“Because it’s impossible! It doesn’t matter how skilled you become with a gun because they don’t exist in Gaeabrande! Even if you got a gun here, you wouldn’t be able to bring it there!”

“Tch.”

Seiya clicks his tongue. *What does he want me to do about it, though?! This is a rule of the spirit world!*

“Hey, Master Seiya...how about lightning magic? I think that geezer at the fortress said something about it being effective against flying enemies. Maybe you could get a god that’s good at lightning magic to teach you...?”

“When I checked Beel Bub’s stats, it was resistant to lightning. It might work

against the generic flies, but it wouldn't work against our main target."

"Oh..."

After talking with Mash, Seiya's eyes start wandering off into space.

"If I won't be able to use guns or missiles...then my only options are bows and arrows. Rista, do you know anyone?"

"I know the Goddess of Archery. It's a little walk from the sanctuary, but I have seen her a few times in the Divine Forest."

"Then let's meet her. Lead the way."

After walking around ten to twenty minutes away from the sanctuary, the scenery starts to change until we find ourselves making our way down a narrow path between lush trees. The crisp air tickles my nose. Small animals resembling squirrels draw their heads back as if they noticed us coming. We journey into the depths of the Divine Forest—an untouched, primeval forest in the unified spirit world.

"You come to places like this often?"

"Yeah, I sometimes come here with Aria to have a picnic. We bring sandwiches and stuff."

"A picnic, huh? How about doing a little work sometime, you bum?"

"Wh-who are you calling a bum?! What do you think I'm doing right now?! I'm working! So what's wrong with having a little picnic every once in a while!"

Before long, the small path disappears until only trees stand before us.

Aria once said, *"The Goddess of Archery, Mitis, trains alone in the open slightly up ahead, so let's have the picnic here. We wouldn't want to bother her, after all."* That's why, whenever I hang out with Aria, we never go any farther than this. The only time I have seen Mitis was passing by her on the narrow trail.

"...Let's go."

Pushing through the trees and bushes, we make our own path and advance forward. After some time goes by, the dense trees gradually become sparser.

Aside from the largest tree, enshrined in the middle of the Divine Forest,

there are few trunks around the open space. Like a beautiful work of art, Mitis is pulling back the arrow fitted on her bow. Her pure-white hair flows to her hips like silk, and her narrow eyes have a sophisticated air.

A goddess of refined beauty. That's the impression I get when I see her.

The moment Mitis releases the arrow, it cuts through the wind before immediately disappearing among the trees. Feeling this is the perfect time to say something, I speak up.

"I apologize for interrupting your training, Lady Mitis."

"Oh my... Ristarte, was it? How do you do?"

She speaks in a polite, unique manner.

I want to say *Nice shot!* and strike up a conversation with her by complimenting her archery skills, but all she does is shoot at a row of trees. As I stand there at a loss for words, Mitis smiles at me.

"There is a target between those trees in the distance."

"O-oh...I had no idea..."

I squint in the direction she indicates, but all I can see is lush vegetation. Despite having good vision, I cannot see any target for the life of me.

"A-anyway, this Hero here was hoping you would teach him archery and—"

Seiya sticks his arm out and cuts me off midsentence.

"Seiya...?"

"Before that, I want to see if you're really as good as they say. Look up."

I gaze up at the sky to find three colossal firebirds soaring in circles. They're Automatic Phoenixes that Seiya created with his magic.

"I see you can hit a nonmoving target from afar, but what about something that darts through the sky? If you can't do that much, then you're wasting my time."

"S-Seiya! You're being extremely rude!"

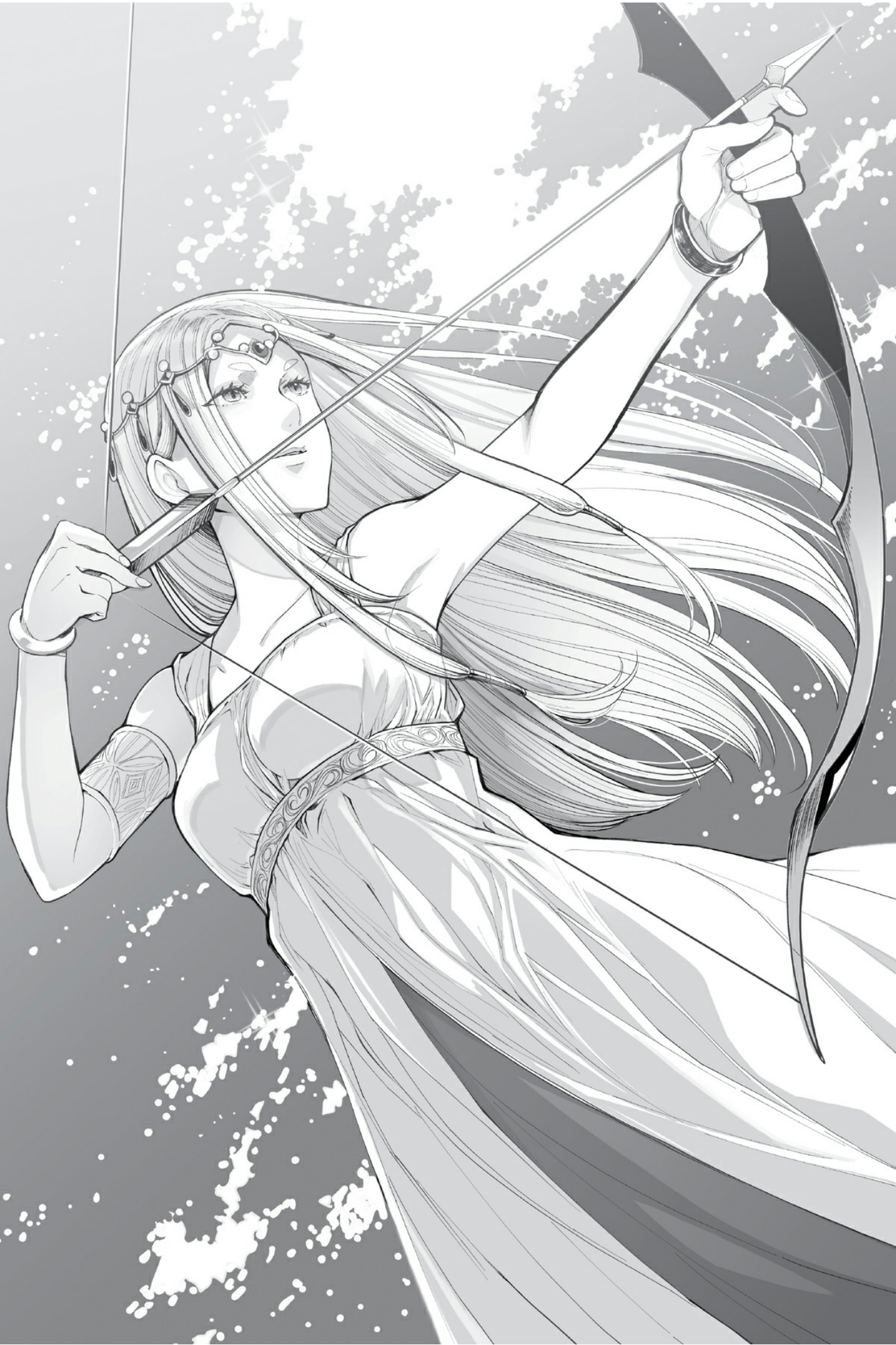
But Mitis simply smiles with kindness.

“You wish for me to hit those magical birds, yes? Very well.”

Thereupon, Mitis places the bow she was holding on the ground.

“This is merely a practice bow. I use a magic bow for battle.”

As she sticks her glowing left arm straight out, she says: “Shining Arrow...”



Before I even realize, she's holding a bow of light in her left hand. Simultaneously, in her drawn-back right hand is an arrow almost indistinguishable from a beam of sunshine—in addition to a thin, glowing bowstring between her fingers.

The arrow of light points to the sky, but the phoenixes are circling at an incredible speed. Just when I thought she was hesitating, her eyes, previously narrowed like threads, open wide.

Thereupon, she lets go of the arrow, which is instantly followed by an explosion in the sky so powerful that I can feel my eardrums shaking.

...I have no idea what just happened, but when the smoke clears, there isn't a single phoenix in the air.

What the...?! I'm positive she only shot one arrow! So why are all three of them gone?!

As I stand there in blank astonishment, Seiya starts analyzing the situation.

"She waited until the phoenixes were lined up over one another before shooting...thus, destroying all three with one shot..."

N-no way! She was able to predict and see the moment they all overlapped?! I didn't think such a feat was humanly possible! I mean, I guess she isn't a human, but whatever!

Seiya nods with an air of satisfaction.

"Hmph. I should be able to kill Beel Bub with this... All right, I'll let you train me."

It's as if Seiya were the one doing Mitis a favor. However...

"I have one condition if I am going to train you. Hero, what magic type is your forte?"

"Fire magic."

"Then have you acquired the magical bow of flames? In other words, have you already learned Fire Arrow?"

"No, not yet."

“I see. Then first, you must learn Fire Arrow before we train. I shall teach you my abilities after that.”

What Mitis is saying is perfectly reasonable. If you can't create a magic bow with your specialty, you're never going to be able to learn a divine archery ability.

Mitis's eye creases even more deeply as she smiles.

“However, even if you are unable to acquire Fire Arrow, I am sure we can find something else in which to train you.”

A different kind of training...? What is she talking about...?

But Seiya shakes his head.

“No, I have to learn how to use a bow, or it'll be meaningless.”

He then turns to Elulu, who is standing behind him.

“You know how to use Fire Arrow, right?”

“Y-yep!”

“Teach me. Right now.”

“N-now?! I know you're talented, but I don't think it's something you can easily learn! It took me about a year!”

“Just teach me. We don't have time.”

“O-okay. First, extend your left hand...then imagine that the fire magic coming out of it symbolizes a bow...”

Elulu lets out a dry chuckle as she gives instruction.

“Don't worry about not being able to do it at first. It's normal. But after practicing hundreds, thousands of times, I'm sure you'll be able to—”

“Like this?”

However, a fiery bow is already materializing in Seiya's left hand.

“...Huh?”

Elulu's eyes open wide.

“B-but this is where things get difficult! Next, you need to materialize an arrow in your right— No way?!”

Seiya holds an arrow made out of fire in his right hand as he pulls back the fiery bowstring.

“B-b-but this is really, *really* where things get difficult! I’m sure you won’t be able to shoot the arrow even one meter, but don’t let that get you down. You just—”

Seiya aims the fire arrow into the sky and releases. It soars into the heavens before disappearing into the great blue yonder.

“H-h-hitting your target is *really* what’s difficult, though. Even I still can’t—”

The next arrow Seiya shoots hits a narrow tree, a few dozen meters ahead, right in the trunk, causing it to catch fire.

“I hit my target. This is easy.”

Following that, Seiya looks back at Mitis.

“Is this good enough?”

“Y-you are a quick learner, Hero—marvelously so.”

Mitis wears an astonished expression, but before long, her lips mirthfully curl upward.

“However, that is exactly why you were the chosen one. Very well. Let us begin training.”

Leaving Seiya behind in the forest, Mash, Elulu, and I return to the sanctuary. Of course, I don’t forget to cheer Elulu up on the way back.

“Aagh...! I’m sooo depressed!”

“Don’t let it get to you, Elulu! He’s an anomaly!”

Mash suddenly taps me on the shoulder.

“Hey, Rista, what should Elulu and I do while we’re here?”

“Hmm... Did Seiya say anything?”

“I asked him before leaving the forest, but he just said, ‘*How about you go to*

the cafeteria and have a snack or something?”

“W-wow... I don’t know why I expected anything different...”

“Yeah, there’s no way I’m just gonna sit around and eat snacks for the next three days. We wanna get stronger, too, you know? Anyway, is there any god you could introduce us to so we can train?”

“Hmm... Well, you trained with Cerceus last time, so how about training under Adenela? That would be the same order Seiya trained in as well.”

I recommend the Goddess of War, Adenela, who is a rank above Cerceus.

“Taking the same training path Master Seiya took...! Good idea! Let’s do it!”

“What about you, Elulu?”

“I don’t feel like training today... I’ll just eat snacks in the cafeteria...”

“O-okay! No need to rush! Let’s go get some macarons together!”

Setting aside Elulu’s training for tomorrow, I go out in search of Adenela, but when I arrive before her room underneath the sanctuary, the door is locked. Nobody answers when I knock, either. With no choice but to give up, I wander around the sanctuary with Mash until we run into the muscle-bound action figure, Cerceus.

“Yo, Cerceus!”

“Hey, Cerceus. Have you seen Adenela anywhere?”

His face changes color when he hears Mash and me cheerfully greet him.

“S-seeing that you two are here, does that mean the Hero is here, too?!”

“Yeah, but he’s training in the Divine Forest right now. Why do you ask?”

“Because Adenela is a mess! You know how she’s always been a little sick in the head, right? Well, now she’s even sicker thanks to that Hero of yours!”

...I completely forgot. Last time we came to the spirit world, Adenela cried tears of blood and made a scene at the courtyard because Seiya turned her down.

“S-so how is she right now?”

“Every day, she repeatedly mutters to herself: ‘S-S-S-Seiya. I-I-I’ll n-n-never forgive youuu. I’m going to k-k-k-kill you...’ The first time I heard her, I thought she was humming a hip-hop song or something.”

“I-it’s seriously that bad?!”

“Yeah, so watch your back. I’m serious. You never know when she might pop up...and shove a knife in your back.”

I shudder as Cerceus warns me with a dead-serious look on his face.

N-not only can I not have Mash train under her, I have to make sure we avoid her entirely!

I imagine Adenela sharpening a sword, her eyes overcome with insanity, as she quietly laughs to herself, *Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh...* A shiver shoots up my spine.

Darkness Intensifies

"I heard what happened. I tried to cheer her up, but she wouldn't listen..." Aria says before letting out a bitter laugh. I'd brought Mash and Elulu to her room to talk about Adenela.

"Hey, Aria, what do you think I should do? Do you think Great Goddess Ishtar could help me if I told her what happened?"

"Hmm... I don't know about that... I mean, first Adenela was dumped, then she was scolded by Great Goddess Ishtar afterward. Getting the Great Goddess involved would be too cruel."

"Yeah...I guess you're right. But if, by any chance, she ever stabbed Seiya..."

"Oh, you and Cerceus have the wildest imaginations. Adenela would never do something like that. Even if she did by chance try something, Seiya will know what to do."

Aria then takes a sip of her tea.

What?! Is it just me, or is Aria being a little too calm? What if something happens that we could have prevented? What if that gifted Hero is killed by not the enemy but a goddess? I have to make sure that doesn't happen. I should probably find Adenela first so that we can have a long talk. Then I'll tell Seiya to stay clear of Adenela...

Right as I'm coming up with a plan, the door to Aria's room flies wide open.

"Master Seiya!"

"Oh...! Seiya!"

The Hero himself is standing at the doorway. I'm just as startled as they are.

"Seiya?! What are you doing here?! What happened to training?!"

"I'm taking a break, so I came here to talk to her."

Seiya approaches Aria.

“You called yourself the Goddess of the Seal before, right? Is there any ability where you could seal away a monster for an eternity?”

Aria lowers her head to Seiya.

“I’m sorry, but I do not possess such an ability. I’m good at breaking seals, though...”

“All right. Got it.”

Huh? An ability to seal away monsters? Why would Seiya even ask her that?

While watching their exchange, it suddenly hits me.

O-ohhh! Seiya is looking for something to replace Igzasion. He’s searching for a way to defeat the Demon Lord since he couldn’t get the strongest weapon in Gaeabrande! Deep within my heart, I find myself proud of my cautious Hero, who is considering the big picture instead of obsessing with what’s in front of him. I just have to put these feelings into words.

“You’re amazing, Seiya! Even during your break, you’re trying to come up with ways to defeat the Demon Lord!”

Seiya instantly casts a piercing gaze at me. That’s when I realize I said something I shouldn’t have.

“Huh? A way to defeat the Demon Lord? But we have Igzasion.”

“Yeah, Ristie, what are you talking about?”

Mash and Elulu stare hard at me.

Ahhhhhh!! I’m such an idiot! Wh-what should I do?!

Before long, Seiya chimes in to help me.

“We don’t know what will happen during the final battle, so it’s only natural to search for another way to effectively attack the Demon Lord. Plus, if possible, I don’t plan on using Igzasion until then. Wouldn’t want to chip the blade.”

Elulu tilts her head to the side.

“I don’t know if it’ll chip... I mean, it’s the strongest weapon in the world...”

They both give dubious glares, but...

“Well, that’s my master for you! Always being cautious!”

“That’s so Seiya!”

A smile tugs Elulu’s lips.

Th-thank goodness! That would have sounded like the strangest excuse if it were anyone else, but it does sound like something that Seiya would do! Elulu and Mash seem to be persuaded at the very least!

Seiya points the sheathed Igzasion—the platinum sword-plus—at me.

“So, Rista, hold on to this for me.”

“O-okay... Ouch, ouch, ouch?!”

Seiya vigorously shoves the sheath into my chest as if he were saying, *You just had to open your mouth.*

“Gyaaaaaaah! My boobs...! You’re crushing theeeeeem!”

Aria giggles.

“You two sure get along, don’t you?”

What?! This isn’t some heartwarming scene! He’s literally trying to crush my boobs!

“...I need to get back to training.”

Seiya turns on his heel after finally giving up on destroying my chest.

“Ugh! That hurt, you know!”

Rubbing my half-smooshed chest, I call out to the Hero before he leaves the room.

“Seiya! Watch out for Adenela!”

“Why?”

“She’s mad at you for being mean to her last time!”

“What did I do to her? I can’t remember.”

His expression is the epitome of indifference as he shuts the door. After Seiya

leaves the room, Mash lets out a sigh.

“*Sigh...* It doesn’t sound like that Adenela person is going to help me train, either... What am I gonna do now?”

“Let’s eat snacks together, Mash!”

“Dammit! Is eating snacks for the next three days really my only option?!”

That’s when Aria approaches Mash.

“Oh my... It seems you have a hidden power within you.”

“Are you talking about my ability Dragon God Metamorphosis? Yeah, I can apparently turn into a dragon if I really try, which is one of the reasons why I want to train more and raise my level...”

“Hmm, the limit seems similar to a seal. Would you like me to break it for you?”

“...! Seriously?! You can do that?!”

Even I’m surprised.

“Aria...! Are you sure you want to do that?! Do the spirit world rules even allow that?!”

“All I am going to do is unlock a power that he already has. It won’t be a problem. Besides, I am simply going to teach him how to do it. It isn’t something that can be done in a day, so this will be part of his training.”

If a high-level goddess like Aria says it’s okay, then it’s okay. I guess I can leave Mash to Aria, but Elulu...

As I stare at Elulu, she sends me an awkward smile.

“Don’t worry about me, Ristie! I’ll just hang out in the cafeteria and eat some sweets! I love sweets!”

Elulu seems to have lost some confidence after everything that’s happened.

Aria places a hand on her shoulder.

“You have great potential as well. I will be able to awaken this power within you. What do you say? Would you like to give it a try?”

heh-heh—m-must be back as well, right?”

“N-no, I came back myself this time! Seiya isn’t here!”

I promptly spit out a lie.

“O-oh, he isn’t? R-really?”

“R-r-really!”

“Th-then did you n-need me for something?”

“Nope! Don’t need a thing!”

I’m panicking so much that my lies are starting to not make sense.

“Th-then why are you in m-my room?”

Adenela regards me suspiciously, which causes me to panic even more.

“I-it’s, um... I just... I just wanted to see the inside of your room! I—I like looking at other people’s rooms! Wow, I like what you did with the place!”

“...R-really?”

For some time after that, Adenela and I stare in silence at the wall with “Kill” scrawled all over it.

“Aria, Aria, Aria! We’ve got trouble! This is bad! This is *really* bad!”

I frantically return to Aria’s room and cling to her.

“Take a deep breath, Rista. What happened?”

“Adenela...! Go to her room and see for yourself! She wrote ‘Kill’ all over one of the walls in her room! I was so shocked that I accidentally even told her she had a nice place for some reason!”

But Aria gently smiles.

“Oh, she didn’t write that because of Seiya. That’s always been there. It’s what they call street art.”

“*That’s* street art?! You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“At any rate, the wall has been like that for a long time now. You must not have noticed before, since her room is so dark.”

So she actually designed her room like that?! Unbelievable! Who does that?!

“You worry too much, Rista.”

“B-but, Aria...!”

Before I can argue any further, Aria sticks up her index finger with a “shhh.” I look to my side to find Mash and Elulu sitting on the floor with their legs crossed as if they are meditating.

“I’m having them deeply concentrate right now, so could you be a little quieter?”

“S-sorry.”

Not wanting to get in the way of their training, I reluctantly retire from Aria’s room.

Aria’s sweet. She probably thinks of both Adenela and me as little sisters. But...

But Adenela is a threat right now! My only choice is to protect Seiya myself!

The next day, Mitis and Seiya diligently continue their training in the Divine Forest.

“Seiya, the eye is what is most important in archery. Focus your attention on your eyes. Having vision that can see the enemy’s position from far away is important.”

Taking Mitis’s advice to heart, Seiya aims the arrow of light at a distant tree before shooting. He seems to have already mastered the magic bow of light. Seiya follows with a question next.

“Would it be possible to shoot multiple arrows at once?”

“Just because it’s a magic bow— No, because it is a magic bow, shooting requires mental concentration to the utmost extent. That is what gives it power and allows the arrow to shoot distances far greater than normal. Therefore, the most you could do is rapidly fire the shafts and mimic shooting multiple arrows at once. However, three shots in a row are the most a human would be able to shoot at that speed.”

Mitis points an arrow of light toward the sky. The moment she shoots, another magic arrow has already been formed in her hand. She immediately launches that one as well. She creates and discharges multiple light arrows one after another, but she's so quick that it looks like she shoots seven beams of light into the blue yonder.

"As you can see, even I can only shoot seven arrows in a row. If I use Order and am able to unlock my true powers, then I could perhaps shoot ten in a row, though..."

"Seven arrows, huh? Let's imagine you aimed those seven shots at an enemy. What's the possibility that they'd dodge?"

"If I use Shining Arrow, which surpasses all other magic arrows in both precision and firing range, and spread out all seven...then it would be absolutely impossible to dodge all seven of them. Such a monster doesn't exist."

"Are you sure?"

"I swear on my honor as the Goddess of Archery. It would be impossible."

Mitis breaks into a cheerful smile.

"In any case, rapidly shooting seven arrows in a row is beyond human boundaries."

"I was just asking."

After I wait under the shade of a tree for a while, Mitis bows to Seiya before disappearing into the depths of the woods. Looks like they're taking a break. I approach Seiya and hand him the lunch I made.

"So how's training going?"

"As planned. I should be able to master rapid-fire by tomorrow."

"Really? That's great. By the way, if possible, make sure not to go near the sanctuary until we leave tomorrow. Who knows what Adenela will do to you if she sees you."

"What do you mean?"

"I told you yesterday. She's pissed at you."

“You can’t tell me not to see her.”

“I mean, yeah, you’re free to do whatever you want, but I’d prefer it if you didn’t see her right now...okay? I’ll bring Mash and Elulu here tomorrow and create a gate, so we can return to Gaeabrande directly from here.”

“Rista, why are we even having this conversation?”

“What...? I’m just watching out for you so that you don’t run into her.”

“You’re not making any sense.”

Seiya points to the area behind me.

“Adenela’s been behind you the entire time.”

...*What?*

I slowly look back.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh.”

Adenela is ominously grinning so closely behind me that I can almost feel her breathing.

“Gyaaaaaaah!”

I scream, then my legs give out from under me just like yesterday, causing me to drop to my knees!

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh. I knew y-you would never come back all b-by yourself, so I’ve b-been following you e-ever since you left the sanctuary...”

After saying that in an amused manner, Adenela slides the sword from the sheath at her waist.

“A-Adenela?! P-please control yourself!”

“I—I can’t. I will never f-forgive that m-m-man.”

Her long, messy black hair begins standing on end like a Japanese ogress out for revenge. She lowers her hips while facing Seiya.

I-I’ve seen this stance before! This is the stance for Eternal Sword! She’s really planning on fighting Seiya...!

“D-draw your sword, Seiya. I-I’m going to show y-you the real Eternal

Sword...!”

Bloodlust radiates from her body, ready to explode at any second. Seiya, however, looks as indifferent as ever.

“Long time no see, Adenela. How have you been?”

Both Adenela and I are taken aback by his greeting.

“Wh-what do you think y-you’re doing? What you did to me was u-unspeakable. I will never f-f-forgive you.”

“Your hair is damaged.”

Seiya defenselessly approaches Adenela, then touches her hair as it stands straight up.

“Wh-what do you th-think you’re—?”

“S-Seiya?! Watch out! She’s going to stab you!”

But Seiya simply strokes Adenela’s head affectionately, as if he were petting a cat.

“S-s-stop. I-I’m going to m-make you pay...”

But even then, Seiya doesn’t stop, and before long, her hair slowly softens before returning back to normal.

“Yes. That’s a good girl.”

“Seiya...! Cut it out!”

I jerk Seiya over by the arm, stopping his reckless behavior. Then I look at Adenela, who is faintly shaking.

“I-I’ll never f-f-f-forgive you...”

Ack! She’s furious! How am I going to stop her?!

However, Adenela just stares at the ground as she mutters: “I—I...f-f-forgive... you...”

“...What?”

It wasn’t my imagination, though. After doing a complete one-eighty, Adenela lifts her head. Her eyes, once burning with bloodlust, have transformed into

hearts as if she were in love.

“...! What happened to never forgiving him?!”

“I d-don’t know, but I c-completely forgive him now... In fact...I’m in I-love...!”

The sword drops to the ground, and Adenela wraps her arm around Seiya until Mitis returns. Seiya suddenly casts a piercing glare at Adenela.

“Adenela, I need to train now, so stop being an eyesore and go annoy someone else.”

“O-okay. I I-love you...!”

...?! Did she even hear the awful things he just said?! Did the head pats make her so happy she doesn’t even realize he’s insulting her?!

From under a tree, Adenela watches over Seiya in rapt admiration as he trains. I regard her disdainfully until I suddenly remember what Aria said.

“Seiya will know what to do.”

Sh-she was right. *Huh, Aria understands Seiya even better than I do...*

I feel so stupid for getting all worked up over nothing, and my body turns into jelly. I limply plop myself down next to Adenela.

...Little did I know that true fear was lurking just around the corner...



Nympho

“I told you he’d be fine, didn’t I?”

“I feel stupid for worrying.”

The next day, I stand before Aria’s room as she smiles after hearing what happened.

“You can say whatever you want about Adenela, but she’s still a goddess. She would never take the life of a human who was summoned. Besides, Seiya can take care of himself for the most part.”

Sigh. Aria’s better than me at everything. But...even then...

“Why do you understand Seiya so much better than me, even though I’ve spent more time with him? It’s frustrating...”

I’m just venting, but Aria begins stressing her words for some reason.

“Th-that’s because you always talk to me about him, you know?! Telling me he’s cautious and strong and whatnot! That’s why I knew he would be able to figure something out!”

“O-oh yeah. That makes sense.”

“More importantly, check out Elulu and Mash! I’ll show you how much their training has paid off!”

Aria reaches for the doorknob and opens the door. Then she calls out to Mash and Elulu, who are quietly sitting while they train.

“Hey, Mash! Show Rista what you learned!”

Mash is slightly startled by the sudden voice, but he stands and extends his right hand in my direction. My bewilderment is short-lived, as Mash’s right hand gradually transforms! The transformation is different from that of the other dragonewts, though. Mash is still a human, and only his right hand has changed,

into a massive dragon claw covered in scales.

“A-Aria?! What’s going on?!”

“Part of the Dragon God Metamorphosis’s seal has been broken through mental concentration. The dragon claw has raised his attack power considerably.”

“Whatcha think, Rista? Pretty cool, huh?!”

Seeing Mash brimming with confidence with his newly found skill brings me so much joy.

“Yeah, it’s amazing! Good job, Mash!”

“Heh!”

“Your giant dragon hand doesn’t fit the rest of your body, so it’s kind of gross...but I’m really proud of you!”

“Hey?! Whaddaya mean ‘gross’?!”

“Ristie! It’s not gross! If you just look at his hand, it’s really cool! But I guess as a whole...it’s a little...”

“‘It’s a little’ what?! Say it!”

“Come on, you two. Don’t be like that. Mash was able to learn his special ability, Laughably Large Right Hand, in a short period of time solely due to his hard work.”

“Hey! Are you making fun of me, too?!”

Elulu places a hand on Mash’s shoulder before he bursts with rage.

“Now, now, Mash. Relax.”

But for some reason, Elulu maliciously smirks, albeit faintly. Following, Mash says: “Whaaat dooo youuu thiiink yooou’re doooing?”

...What? Why is Mash talking funny all of a sudden?

“Eluluuu! Youuu liiittle...! Geeet baaack heeere!”

He tries to grab Elulu, but he moves like an old person.

I-is this what I think it is?!

Aria smiles.

“This is Delay, a support spell that slows down your opponent’s movement.”

“W-wait. Does that mean that Elulu’s hidden talent was support magic?!”

“Yes.”

Finally caught by Mash, Elulu apologizes.

“I—I said I’m sorry! I’ll turn you back to normal, so please forgive me, Mash!”

She touches his shoulder once more, and he instantly starts moving around nonstop.

“CutItOut!NowI’mWayTooFastHurryUpAndTurnMeBackToNormalOrI’mNever GonnaTalkToYouAgainOrEatWithYouOrListenToYouYouJerk!”

Flailing his arms and legs around, Mash machine-gun talks without even taking a second to breathe.

N-now she used Haste! She learned Delay’s opposite spell, too!

Aria pats Elulu on the head as if deeply moved.

“This ability is something you acquired through your environment. I am sure your wish to help everyone is what gave you this power. It’s truly beautiful.”

“Hee-hee!”

Elulu is glowing.

As she should be! Both Delay and Haste are powerful tools that will surely help Seiya! I’m happy for you, Elulu!

After Haste wears off and Mash turns back to normal, Elulu profusely apologizes as he sulks. Wearing a serious expression, Aria says: “Come back again next time. I am sure Mash will learn how to completely turn into a dragon and Elulu will be able to learn even more support magic.”

“We’ll be back!”

“Yeah! Thank you so much!”

I gaze at Aria in admiration.

“I would have left them with you from the start if I knew this would happen!”

As I start to regret that I might have done things the hard way and not the smart way...

“No time or effort was wasted. Only because they have had various experiences were their talents able to bloom.”

“You really think so? *Phew...* Anyway, I feel pretty confident about this next battle, now that Mash and Elulu are stronger and Seiya’s archery training is going smoothly!”

Aria suddenly freezes in response to my casual chatter.

“‘Archery’...?! Rista, don’t tell me that Seiya is learning archery from Mitis right now!”

“Of course he is! There’s only one Goddess of Archery, is there not?”

All of a sudden, Aria grabs me by the shoulders and yells:

“How could you be so stupid! You don’t know how frightening she can be!”

Her face turns completely pale. It’s hard to believe this is the same person who was so calm and collected when I was panicking about Adenela.

“Wh-what?! Even more frightening than Adenela?!”

“You cannot even compare the two! Do you know why she’s in the Divine Forest? Because she kidnapped every summoned Hero one by one and used them to satisfy her sexual urges! Great Goddess Ishtar sent her to the forest to calm her down! Bringing men to that forest is taboo!”

“What?! Y-you’re kidding, right?! If that’s true, then why did you keep bringing me to that forest to have picnics?!”

“Because we’re goddesses! *Sigh...* What are we going to do?!”

“B-but nothing strange has happened so far! They’re just training! I’m sure Mitis has changed her ways and—”

“Mitis knows today’s Seiya’s last day of training, right?! I bet she was saving herself for this moment, and she’s about to explode!”

“O-oh no...!”

“You know it’s absolutely prohibited for a goddess and a human to have

sexual intercourse, right?! You won't be able to save Gaeabrande anymore! You have to make sure he doesn't blow it!"

"Tell that to Mitis!"

"Rista...?! This is no time for jokes! Go get Seiya! Hurry!"

"O-okay!!"

I fly out of Aria's room.

"R-Rista, wait!"

"Ristie...! We'll come with you!"

Mash and Elulu follow behind me. I think about just how severe the situation is as I run.

That one-in-a-billion talented Hero is going to have sex with a goddess, and then it'll all be over?! No, I won't let it end like this! At the very least, it should be me that he— Ack! What am I thinking?! At any rate, I'm not going to let Mitis have her way with him!

After sprinting all the way to the training area as fast as we could, Elulu, Mash, and I witness a horrific sight. Hanging from a thick branch of the largest tree is Mitis. Beneath the goddess, whose entire body is wrapped in rope, stands Seiya.

"S-Seiya?! What's going on?!"

"Don't ask me. She told me to meet her here in ten minutes, but when I got here, she was like this."

"...Hee-hee-hee."

I suddenly hear laughter from above. Hanging from the tree, Mitis begins to speak.

"Seiya, this is your final rapid-fire test. You must shoot three light arrows at the exact same spot on this special rope tied around me, or it will not snap. Your target is the rope over my head."

Ohhh! So this was just part of his training! But why did she tie herself to the branch?

“If you successfully cut through the rope, my bonds will come undone as well, leaving me completely exposed as I fall to the ground. From there, you are to catch my nude body and make passionate love to me. This shall be your reward for passing the test.”

“...! Does this goddess have no shame?!”

I shudder, taken aback by how she could say such a thing with a straight face. Aria is right. She’s a total nympho! What are you going to do, Seiya?! If you shoot her down, then all that awaits is an unwanted reward! Maybe we should just leave her! B-but I feel like that might come back to bite us in the long run, too!

“I have patiently waited...and waited...and waited these past three days, for Seiya’s beauty has pushed my libido beyond climax.”

Despite restricting her own freedom by tying herself to a tree, Mitis wears an expression burning with ecstasy.

“Now come, Seiya! *Shoot* through the rope with your arrows, so you can shoot your load into me!”

Sh-shoot his *what*?! This goddess is a real creep!

“Seiya! What are you going to do?!”

“There’s only one thing to do.”

Seiya materializes a magic bow of light without even a second’s hesitation! He’s aiming it at Mitis!

“Y-you’re going to shoot the rope?! But if you do that, then Mitis is going to jump you! And she’ll be naked! Are you sure about this?!”

“There’s nothing to worry about.”

Thereupon, Seiya immediately fires the arrow of light at an incredible speed... but he doesn’t hit the rope over her head. Instead, it hits Mitis right between the eyes!

What...? Whaaaaaat?! D-did he just shoot a goddess right through the head?!

“Oh...! Fff...”

Mitis groans oddly. The arrow of light is stuck between her eyebrows and is protruding through the back of her head!

The grotesque sight gives me shivers throughout my body.

What kind of person shoots a goddess in the head just because they know goddesses won't die?! This goddess might be crazy, but this Hero isn't so normal, either!

However, Mitis opens her narrow eyes wide and stares at Seiya.

"You mustn't play games with me, Seiya... Hmph!"

Exerting her strength, the nymphomaniac goddess snaps the ropes constraining her and drops to the ground, entirely disrobed.

"Hee-hee... If needed, I could have escaped from these bonds whenever I wanted to."

Her sexy hourglass figure causes Mash's face to turn completely red.

"Wh-whoaaa!"

"Mash, don't look!"

Elulu covers Mash's eyes with both hands. Following that, Mitis grabs the light arrow sticking through her head.

"This was supposed to be rapid-fire practice. You are going to fail the test at this rate."

Then she slides the arrow out of her head. The gaping hole between her eyes immediately begins to heal.

"You'll need to take a makeup test."

"A-a makeup test...?"

Still stark naked, Mitis gets into a crouching position to sprint.

"Seiya! I am going to attack you and have my way with you! If you wish to stop me, utilize the rapid-fire technique I taught you! This is an important part of training!"

No, I don't think this kind of training exists!

There are so many things wrong that I want to point out. But before I get the chance, Mitis dashes forward, utilizing her arms and legs like a wild animal. The lustful goddess's hair violently flutters in the wind as she charges, but the Hero doesn't even blink! Seiya calmly gets into a fighting stance, aims the bow at Mitis, and draws the arrow. His gallant pose is reminiscent of a statue of a god. Seiya releases the shaft as if renouncing all worldly desires. Before I even realize it, the arrows of light have already pierced Mitis's eyes and mouth without even making a sound!

“Uwooooh!”

With an arrow that starts from her mouth and goes all the way down to her throat, Mitis instantly stops in her tracks and groans. Then Seiya mutters by my side: “Shining Arrow!”

Ooo! These are the fruits of his efforts! A three-shot rapid-fire magic bow of light attack! B-but...! The goddess who taught him that has magic arrows sticking out of her eyes and mouth!

Eek! The horror! It's so gross! I can't look...! B-but now Mitis can't see anything, either!

However, my relief vanishes with a passing moment. Mitis begins chewing the light arrow in her mouth, crunching it into little pieces before swallowing. Despite both of her eyes being pierced, she lowers her posture and begins charging like a beast once more! Laughing like a maniac, she plunges toward Seiya!

“Oo-hee-hee-hee-hya-hya-hya! Goddesses...can't...dieeeeeee! This isn't enough to stop meeeeeee!”

“What the...?! Even with those arrows sticking out of her eyes...?!”

Mitis continues barreling toward Seiya without slowing down in the slightest. Trembling as the shrieking, nude monster swiftly approaches, Elulu screams: “I-I'm scared! Is that really a goddess?!”

“She looks like one of the Demon Lord's goons!”

The instant Mash mutters that, Mitis suddenly changes directions! She's heading straight for Mash!

“Wh-what?! She’s going after Mash?!”

“I shall save the main dish for later and start off with an appetizer! As long as there is grass on the field...!”

What kind of goddess says something like that aloud?! The spirit world is no place for that kind of talk!

“I’ll be on you in three seconds! I shall tear off your clothes within one, have my way with you in two, and finish you off by the third!”

“Ahhhhhhh! M-Master...! Help me!”

Nobody could have suspected this would happen! Wh-what are we going to do?!

However, Seiya points an arrow right at Mitis just moments before she attacks.

“I figured you might go after Mash instead of me, given your excessive libido.”

Instantaneously, multiple arrows shoot out of Seiya’s hand one after another like beams of energy. When they strike Mitis...

“Guuuboooooooo?!”

She lets out a scream beyond description before slamming into a huge tree trunk behind her. I stare hard at Mitis in utter astonishment. The backs of her hands, ankles, and heart are all skillfully pierced with arrows of light like wedges.

Sure of his victory, Seiya makes the magic bow disappear before musing: “Five-Shot Shining Arrow!”

Despite being crucified like a criminal, Mitis suggestively grins from ear to ear.

“N-no longer...can I move...! Not only did you predict my moves...but you—a human—rapidly fired five light arrows in a row...! Bravo...! What a beautiful...display...!”

After the sex-crazed goddess’s head droops down, Seiya slowly turns. Then, bathing in the crimson evening sun with the stark-naked goddess nailed to the tree in the background, Seiya eloquently states: “I’m perfectly prepared.”

“...?!”

As I watch the surreal scene, mouth agape, the perverted goddess suddenly regains consciousness and begins panting.

“Hff... Hff... It’s like my entire body is being penetrated by something thick and long... Hff... Hff...”

Elulu taps me on the arm.

“H-hey, Ristie...? What is Mitis talking about?”

Mash nods in agreement as well.

“Yeah, why is she panting with a smile on her face after being shot with five arrows?”

“D-don’t look! Mash, Elulu, we have to get out of here! Let’s go back to Gaeabrande!”

I cannot let these two innocent kids watch this filth any longer, so I create a gate to Olga Fortress. Then, holding their hands as if I am their guardian, I leap through the gate with Seiya.

Swatting Flies

“Phew... What a sick, twisted, vulgar goddess... Huh?”

Just when I thought we could catch our breath after running away from Eros, the other side of the gate is chaos. Waiting for us outside my gate before Olga Fortress, soldiers are frantically running around, as is the elderly soldier Carlo, who rushes over the moment he sees us.

“Oh, you’re back! I—I need your help! It appears Madam Rosalie went to the flies’ nest alone!”

What?! She really did it?! Even after we told her to wait?! And she went alone, at that! How reckless can you be?!

“We have to go after her!”

“Sir Bhat and his men have already gotten on their horses and gone after her, but we can still catch up if we leave now!”

Carlo and I are panicking, but...

“Relax. Everything is going according to plan.”

Seiya, on the other hand, is perfectly composed.

“Judging by her personality, it was easy to predict she’d do something like this. It hasn’t even been an hour since we left, so she won’t have run into Beel Bub yet.”

“B-but there are massive scout flies circling the giant tree that their nest is in! She might be attacked by them...!”

“Don’t worry. I’ll catch up with her in no time.”

And just like that, Seiya begins to gently levitate. While floating in the air, he glances my way.

“Come on, Rista. We’re flying.”

After getting the location of the nest from Carlo, Seiya and I take flight, carrying Mash and Elulu, respectively. Following Seiya, I do my best to keep up with his blistering speed. A colossal tree a few dozen meters wide eventually starts coming into view.

Due to the countless number of giant flies, the tree serving as their nest has become a jet-black wood perch. Scout flies are patrolling the surrounding skies just like Carlo said they would. Getting close isn’t going to be easy. In fact, there are already a few scout flies lurking around here, despite being relatively far from their base.

Before the scout flies notice us, Seiya turns around and gives me the signal without saying a word. I nod, then descend shortly after him before landing in a grove with a cluster of trees. Seiya looks up at the sky while silently walking past the few meter-tall trees until he comes to a sudden stop.

“Hmm. This spot should do. It’s hard to see from above, and we have a sweeping view of their nest.”

Just like he said, we have an extensive view of the giant tree they use as their base, but at the same time, I can’t believe what I see.

“Huh?!”

Someone is heading straight for the nest, which is swarming with countless buzzing flies. It’s a woman with azure hair and gold-inlaid armor: the Warmaster’s daughter, Rosalie.

Ack! How reckless...! But in a way, it’s so brave...!

The giant flies keep an eye on the intruder, but they cannot approach her. After a closer look, I notice a pale aura of light emitting from Rosalie’s body. I checked her status once earlier, but it looks like she’s using the special ability Light’s Blessing to ward off the weaker flies.

Nevertheless, before long, the swarm surrounding Rosalie splits into two and makes way...for the Aerial Assault Flies’ leader—Beel Bub. The tension causes my heart to race, but Seiya sounds as calm as always.

“She turned out to be a good decoy. I can snipe Beel Bub from here.”

When I look back in disbelief, Seiya has already materialized Shining Arrow.

“‘Snipe’...? D-don’t tell me...you knew this was going to happen, too? You... expected Rosalie to get angry and head toward their nest?”

“Flies are easy to swat when they’re preoccupied with food, after all,” Seiya casually remarks as Mash and Elulu squint behind him.

“Man, I can’t see a thing...”

“M-me neither...”

It seems ordinary humans’ eyesight isn’t good enough to see Rosalie or Beel Bub from here. Seiya’s vision must have considerably improved during his training with Mitis.

“We don’t have much time. Look over there.”

Seiya points at a swarm of scout flies gathering in the sky above.

“Eek! But why...?”

“Flies have an exceptional sense of smell. They must have smelled Rista’s goddess stench.”

“...! What do you mean ‘goddess stench’?! Are you implying I smell?!”

I sniff my armpits. I don’t think they smell...but I have to make sure just in case.

“Hey, Mash! Elulu! I don’t smell, right?!”

“Y-yeah, you don’t smell *that* bad!”

“Y-yeah! It doesn’t really bother me at all!”

“...?! Wait! So I do smell a little?! What kind of smell is it?! Come on, tell me!”

“Shut up. They’re going to find us if you don’t be quiet.”

Seiya then points the magic light bow in Beel Bub’s direction.

“I only have one chance. I’ll aim for the head.”

“C-can you do it?”

“I won’t miss.”

What confidence! If Seiya is that confident, then I’m sure he’ll be able to do it! Beel Bub will be dead before we know it! It’s going to be an anticlimactic end to the battle, but I guess that’s what sniping is all about!

But out of nowhere, we are unexpectedly ambushed. Galloping into the grove comes Rosalie’s right-hand man, Bhat, and a few dozen of his men on horses.

“Oh, hey!! If it isn’t the Hero! I had no idea you were already here!”

The flies soaring above all stop in unison in reaction to his deafening cry.

“K-keep your voice down! The flies are going to find us!”

Elulu scolds them, but she’s loud, too.

“What?! How could I be so stupid! I am terribly sorry about that!”

Bhat apologizes even more loudly than before, triggering Mash to panic and turn to Seiya.

“M-Master! The flies are heading this way!”

“Relax. I can still snipe.”

Seiya remains calm, even after being interrupted by our allies and spotted by the flies overhead. His magic bow is still aimed at Beel Bub.

“...I expected this to happen.”

“Seriously?!”

It’s a little hard to believe, but it’s probably true if Seiya says so.

But at the very next moment, standing before Beel Bub near the enemy’s base in the distance, Rosalie shouts in a voice so loud that we can hear her from here.

“I am the daughter of the Warmaster, Rosalie Roseguard! Beel Bub, I challenge you to a duel!”

Ack! Sh-she told them who she was?! What in the world has gotten into her?!

Just then, Seiya’s nose appears to twitch slightly.

“Seiya?!”

“...It’s fine. I expected this to happen. Yep.”

“Wait! Why did you add a ‘yep’ at the end?! You don’t have to force yourself! You can be honest with me if you want!”

Seiya lets out a sigh, then gradually lowers the magic bow to his waist.

I—I figured this was unexpected... He’s so stubborn...

That’s when Beel Bub starts hauling Rosalie away.

“Y-you bastard! What is the meaning of this! L-let me go!”

How didn’t she see this coming? Of course you’re going to be taken hostage if you tell them you’re the emperor’s daughter!

But even if we want to save her, we have our own problems to deal with now. Ten giant scout flies have surrounded us.

When I turn to Seiya for guidance, he’s looking right back at me as well. Then, without saying a word, he begins aggressively poking my breasts with his sheath.

“Gyaaah! That hurts! My tiiits! They’re gonna cave iiiin! Don’t take your frustration out on me!”

“I’m not. Rista, go.”

“Huh?”

“I’m telling you to fly. Get over there before they take that stupid woman away.”

...A-all by myself?

“I’ll catch up after taking care of these flies. Until then, buy us some time.”

“Wh-what...?! Even if I do somehow catch up with them, how do you expect me to slow Beel Bub down?!”

“Hmm... Say, *Nice weather we’re having today.*”

“‘Nice weather we’re having today’?! Is that really going to work?!”

“In any event, don’t take your eyes off Rosalie. That’s all you need to remember.”

“F-fine! I’ll do it!”

With grim determination, I spread my wings and take to the air when a giant, grotesque fly’s face appears right in front of me!

“Eeep?!”

But by the time it tries to grab me, Seiya has already put a magic arrow through its head.

“I’ll open a path for you, so don’t worry. Now go, balloon woman.”

“O-okay! Thanks! ...Wait! Who are you calling ‘balloon woman’?!” I yell as I take off alone, chasing after Beel Bub and the kidnapped Rosalie.

Heading north, Beel Bub holds Rosalie tightly in its arms as she struggles. Noticing me, it grimaces and laughs, “Bzz, bzz, bzz!”

“Heh-heh-heh! Well, look what we have here! Those white wings—you’re a goddess from another dimension! Which means that the Hero has finally made his appearance!”

“Yeah, and I have a message from him! Let her go this instant!”

“No problem! After all, I was just planning on using her to lure the Hero out! I have no use for her anymore!”

I inwardly chuckle to myself.

Seiya won’t be able to shoot while you’re holding her! So hurry up and let her go so I can catch her! After that, you’re dead meat!

“Bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz! I’m going to become one of the four generals once I kill the Hero!”

However...contrary to what it said, Beel Bub ascends even higher without releasing Rosalie.

“Huh?! H-hey...!”

I’m taken aback but pursue Beel Bub.

“You said you would let her go!”

“I am! Right after I fly a little higher! Gotta celebrate the Hero’s defeat with

some amazing reverse fireworks!”

Wh-what did it just say?!

“Stop right there!”

But Beel Bub only continues to fly higher. I somehow manage to keep up as it soars toward the heavens at an incredible rate until eventually coming to a sudden stop, flapping its wings in place.

“What do you think?! Quite the view, huh?! Your body would literally explode when it hits the ground from this high up! Splat! I can only imagine the beauty!”

Even then, Rosalie cries out with strength in her voice:

“You’re despicable! Apologize right now for what you did to my men!”

“Huh? Do you understand the situation you’re in? You’ll be meeting them soon enough!”

“Gr...!”

Unable to move and seething with rage, Rosalie grinds her teeth, then fixes her gaze on me.

“Hey!! What happened to the Hero?! Where is he?! Did he not leave to train?!”

“Y-you idiot!”

Beel Bub quizzically tilts its head.

“Hmm? Training, you say? Is he going to try to shoot me with a bow and arrow from the surface, by any chance?”

C-can things get any worse?! It saw right through our plan! Why does this woman always say things that put her at even more of a disadvantage?!

“Looks like I’ll just have to fly even higher before I let her go!”

Thereupon, Beel Bub begins ascending once more with Rosalie in its arms. I try to go after them, but no matter how high they go, there is no sign of them stopping.

J-just how high is it going to take her?!

I suddenly glance down while chasing them and turn completely pale. All I can see below is a sea of clouds. The surface visible between them looks no bigger than a tiny speck of dust.

You've got to be kidding me! Even a magic bow won't be able to reach this high! More importantly, does Seiya even know where we are?!

Beel Bub eventually stops when we've reached an elevation where it's hard to breathe. Then, with a note of amusement in its voice...

"Bzz, bzz, bzz! Not even a magic arrow will be able to hit me this high up! Now, let's see you gloriously splatter!"

Beel Bub starts to unhand Rosalie but then glances at me and buzzes in laughter.

"Oh yeah! I'm gonna have to throw as hard as I can so the goddess can't catch her!"

Shit, shit, shit, shit! Beel Bub has predicted every single one of our moves! I'd be able to catch her if it just dropped her but not if it throws her!

"Y-you cowardly monster! Return to the surface and fight me one-on-one with honor!"

Beel Bub lifts Rosalie over its head, ready to throw her at any second.

Ahhhhhh! What am I going to do?! O-oh yeah...!

Seiya's advice replays in the back of my head, and I decide to give it a try.

"N-nice weather we're having, huh?"

A brief moment of silence goes by before Beel Bub responds, annoyed.

"...What are you doing?"

Yeah, what am I doing?! Have I lost my mind?! Ahhh! I can't save her! Seiya, do something!!

...Just then, I see a faint light out of the corner of my eye. A ray arises from the sea of clouds below before instantly passing by my ear without making a sound.

"Uwooooh...!"

Beel Bub softly moans...while gradually falling off-balance. Instead of launching Rosalie into the ground, its hands unconsciously let go of her. Gravity begins drawing Rosalie back down to the surface, but...

“Rosalie...!”

I immediately reach out to her. The moment she touches my hand, I pull her straight into my arms.

Ack! Her armor is heavy! B-but I managed to catch her! I don't take my eyes off her for even a second, just like Seiya told me!

“...I-I'm sorry,” Rosalie whispers in my ear, but I'm more focused on trying to process what just happened.

...That must have been Shining Arrow! The magic arrow made it all the way up here! So Beel Bub must have been startled and accidentally let go of Rosalie! Anyway, I can't believe he was able to reach this height. It's almost as if he used a sniper rifle with an enhanced scope—no, it was even more precise than that!

I'm moved by Seiya's talent, but still, I gulp.

“Hey now, you've gotta be kidding me. A magic bow? Even though I'm this high? That's impossible...”

More surprising than the arrow reaching this far up is that Beel Bub was able to dodge it...

Sniper

Beel Bub lowers its gaze in the direction from which the light arrow came, then cautiously mentions: “I’ve done a lot of research about magic arrows. You could say it’s the only thing humans can use to oppose me, after all... But something’s not right.”

“What do you mean ‘something’s not right’?!” I yell out to it while holding Rosalie in my arms.

“I wasn’t just randomly flying up. I was doing so with magic bows’ effective range in mind. I don’t care how far light arrows can go. There is no way it should have made it this high from the surface. Plus, not even magic arrows can completely ignore air resistance.”

“Hmph! Do you want me to tell you why the arrow made it this far? It’s because Seiya is a Hero of extraordinary talent that’s one in a billion!”

After a few moments of silence, Beel Bub finally opens its mouth.

“...Lucifer Crowe.”

“Wh-what...?”

“It’s the name of a legendary demon who existed in Gaeabrande long ago. They say Crowe could shoot a magic arrow from the Aness Plains to the top of Mount Glastora. But from the surface to where we are is much farther than Crowe’s magic bow’s effective range.”

“Th-that’s because Seiya is far more gifted than any demon—”

“Wait, wait, wait. That’s a little hard to imagine. I mean, Lucifer Crowe’s a legend. For the sake of argument, even if he was somehow as good as Crowe, there is no way a human would ever be able to surpass a demon. And yet, his arrow made it all the way here and with force, too.”

“Just get to the point! What are you trying to say?!”

Beel Bub lets out an ear-wrenching, roaring laugh.

“There’s only one conclusion possible! The Hero shot that arrow while flying, and he’s closing in on us as we speak!”

“What...?!”

The fly monster points at the sea of clouds below with its pointy hand.

“Just like a hunter crouching in the bushes, he’s hiding somewhere inside this vast sea of clouds! Wait. Actually, he’s probably moving around while concealing himself to make it harder to find him!”

I-it’s just a stupid fly, yet it’s calmly analyzing the situation just like Seiya!

Taken aback by Beel Bub’s surprising intelligence, I glance at the blurred surface in the distance and clench my teeth.

It’s probably spot-on with its analysis of the situation! There is no other way to explain the precision and power of the arrow that almost hit Beel Bub! After taking care of the flies on the surface, Seiya must have noticed that we were out of his magic bow’s effective range, so he flew after us! Then he must have hidden in the clouds somewhere just like Beel Bub said...!

“Hey, Goddess! Do you know what this means? I am the fastest being in the sky in the Demon Lord’s army! There is nobody who can defeat me in the air! In other words, he will have no way to defeat me once I find him! The moment I do is the moment he dies!”

I put on a bold face, but my heart is violently hammering against my chest.

Wh-what are you going to do, Seiya?! You’ll be in serious trouble if you miss!

Beel Bub looks down and taunts Seiya in a powerful voice.

“Yo, Hero! Show me what you’ve got! I won’t run or hide!”

The monster talks a big game, but it’s paying close attention to the clouds so it’s ready for Seiya’s arrow. I secretly use my goddess powers, increasing my dynamic vision. Then I survey the clouds below. Rosalie looks up at me as I hold her in my arms.

“Goddess! Is the Hero going to be okay?! Can he beat that thing?!”

“I-it’ll be fine! Seiya said he was perfectly prepared! He’s going to win! Of course he’s going to win!”

...But a few moments go by and nothing happens. The silence slowly drifts along like the clouds below. Just when I am about to relax, though...the inside of a cloud illuminates continually in the distance! Immediately, I notice something about the luminous points reflecting in my eyes...

S-seven points?! That means there are seven arrows! This is... Don’t tell me it’s...!

“Seven-Shot Shining Arrow!”

This is what makes him one in a billion! Despite being human, he’s already at the Goddess of Archery’s level! And Mitis said that if you use Shining Arrow and spread out all seven arrows...then it would be absolutely impossible to dodge—such a monster doesn’t exist! The luminous points I see in the sea of clouds are all over the place! I bet he calculated and spread his shots so he would hit Beel Bub’s head, arms, legs, and wings! There’s no way to dodge this! It’s like a human trying to dodge a shotgun fired point-blank! It isn’t possible!

I am sure of our victory, but...

“Bzz, bzz, bzz! Rolling Dodge!”

With my goddess-enhanced dynamic vision, I see Beel Bub twist its body like an acrobat before spinning and dodging each ray of light, in spite of them traveling faster than the speed of sound.

Rosalie freaks out even before I do.

“I-it dodged all of them?!”

“Th-that’s impossible...!”

Th-th-this can’t be happening! The Goddess of Archery gave this seven-shot rapid-fire attack her stamp of approval, and yet...!

So this is what it means to be an S-ranked world! The difficulty is beyond the common sense of the gods!

And with that, a sense of despair hangs heavily over my shoulders. The once boundless sea of clouds slowly opens...right where the powerful magic arrows were shot, and before long, the sky is crystal clear. Just as Beel Bub predicted, soaring there is the Hero holding a bow of light.

“There you are, Hero!”

Th-this isn't good! Seiya is at a huge disadvantage in close combat in the sky! B-Beel Bub is going to kill him...!

Beel Bub instantly speeds in Seiya's direction as if planning to tear a defenseless human apart. But out of nowhere, the monster suddenly vomits a purple liquid.

“Gwa...ha...!”

“Huh?! Wh-what's going on?!”

It looks like Beel Bub has no idea what just happened, either. However, it doesn't take me long to figure out.

There's a gaping hole in its stomach! After a slight delay, copious amounts of purple liquid begin pouring out of its body!

Before I even realize it, six birds are flying around Beel Bub. They're similar to the Automatic Phoenixes Seiya creates using fire magic, but they're moderately different. These are brilliantly shining birds of light.

Beel Bub coughs up another pint of purple liquid.

“L-light magic birds...! Where did those come from...?!”

Seiya must have created them, and one of them must have torn through Beel Bub's stomach! B-but when did he conjure six birds out of light magic? ...W-wait! Six birds? If you count the one that drilled through Beel Bub's body and self-destructed, then that makes seven in total—the same number of arrows Beel Bub just dodged! It all makes sense now! After Beel Bub dodged Seven-Shot Shining Arrow, the arrows transformed into Garudas! Then they must have flown back and attacked Beel Bub when its guard was down! In other words...

“Transform: Automatic Garuda!”

Beel Bub probably realizes now what Seiya's strategy was.

“You...little piece of...!”

The monster’s utterance drips with spite, but those end up being Beel Bub’s final words. As the demon starts slowing down, the birds of light ram into it, exploding at an ultrahigh temperature and emitting a blinding flash. The only thing before me when the light fades is Beel Bub’s charred remains as they plummet to the surface.

...My entire body is riddled with goose bumps.

Wh-what is with this Hero?! He isn’t satisfied just learning the divine skill Seven-Shot Shining Arrow, despite it apparently being an impossible feat for humans? He even considered what to do if all the arrows missed?! Even though Mitis said no monster would be able to dodge the attack?! I mean, what kind of person would doubt the Goddess of Archery?! I-it’s like... It’s like he doesn’t even listen!

Floating in the distance, Seiya watches Beel Bub drop to the surface, but without showing even a hint of satisfaction, he disappears into the clouds below.

But it’s fine! It’s absolutely okay! If he didn’t pursue the monster’s charred remains, he wouldn’t be Seiya Ryuuguuin! The only one who can save the S-ranked world Gaeabrande is this man—a man who won’t even let the words of the gods sway him from his overly cautious ways!

I descend back into the woods where Elulu and Mash are waiting, taking the emperor’s daughter with me. When I see Seiya, the first words that come out of my mouth are: “I saw what you did! Transform: Automatic Garuda! That was amazing!”

Thereupon, Seiya twists his head.

“Trans-what? What are you talking about?”

“Oh...sorry! I came up with that name myself! Hey, what was that move you just used? The one where the light arrows transformed into magic birds!”

“Oh, you mean Birdie Boom Boom?”

“...! What kind of name is that?! Since when did you start naming things like

that?!”

“What? I’ve never put much thought into it.”

“Th-then you can use the name I came up with. Take it.”

“Hmph. That ‘transform’ something or other? It’s just long and drawn out. It’s not even a good name.”

“It still beats Birdie Boom Boom at the very least!”

Mash and Elulu push me out of the way to rush over to Seiya.

“Master Seiya! That was insane!”

“Yeah, seriously, nobody can beat you!”

As they shower Seiya with praise, Bhat and the other soldiers crowd around Rosalie.

“Ah, Madam Rosalie! I am so glad you’re safe!”

But she bluntly tells the moved soldiers to get out of the way and approaches us. I think Rosalie is going to thank us for saving her, but she pins Seiya with a frigid stare.

“You are no Hero, just as I thought. There is no honor in winning with a surprise attack like that. A true Hero would risk their life to confront the enemy head-on in a fair fight. Just like my father.”

Rosalie wastes no time in vilifying Seiya, causing me to lose all sense of propriety as a goddess.

“Listen here, you! The only reason you’re alive is because Seiya saved you! Would it kill you to show some respect and thank him?!”

But Seiya sticks his hand out in front of me as I rage.

“Seiya?! Say something to her!”

“Just let it go, Rista.”

“B-but...!”

“Just let the dog bark.”

Rosalie’s face immediately turns red.

“Wh-who are you calling a dog?!”

Wh-whoa...! This Hero is amazing...! He dealt more damage with just five words than he could have yelling at her a hundred times!

“Mn...!”

Rosalie is on the verge of tears, but...

“Ah! Rosalie’s going to start acting like a dog again!”

Seeing Elulu’s eyes glowing with expectation forces Rosalie to swallow her tears and twitch her nose before walking away in silence. Bhat and the others bow before following after her as well.

Seiya lets out a deep sigh.

“...All right, then. Let’s go take care of the leftover flies.”

Oh yeah. Beel Bub may be dead, but there are still over a hundred of its giant underlings flying around their nest. We can’t afford to ignore them.

While I stare in admiration at the stoic Hero who doesn’t even let his amazing victory go to his head, he places his hand on Elulu’s and Mash’s shoulders.

“Mash, Elulu, you’re up.”

We’re all surprised by what we hear.

“I’m not blind. I know you two trained and acquired new abilities.”

“M-Master...!”

“S-Seiya...!”

“Let’s go. Show me these new skills of yours.”

“Y-you’ve got it!”

“I’ll do my best!”

With mirth in their steps, they follow Seiya in high spirits until they reach the nest...where Seiya repeatedly uses Seven-Shot Shining Arrow and annihilates the remaining flies in the blink of an eye.

“U-um... Master Seiya...?”

“Seiya...?”

Elulu and Mash stare at the hundred or so dead flies in muted shock. Seiya then shifts his focus to Elulu.

“Perfect. Now, Elulu, use Haste on Mash to increase his speed.”

“Uh... O-okay.”

After Elulu casts Haste, Seiya instructs Mash to transform his hand into a dragon claw.

“Next, I want you to use that giant hand and bring the dead fly carcasses over here.”

“O...kay...?”

Mash restlessly starts carrying the dead flies to a giant circle Seiya drew with a tree branch.

“Hmm. Haste really helps speed things along. It’s extremely satisfying to watch.”

After Mash finishes, Seiya—as pleased as can be—burns the gathered fly carcasses with Hellfire until they disintegrate into nothingness.

“Good work, you two.”

While Seiya is genuinely complimenting them from his point of view, they drop their shoulders and hang their heads low, clearly dejected. Staring hard at his hand, Mash mutters: “What am I, a broom?”

While I try to come up with just the right words to cheer them up, I hear the sound of horses’ hooves from behind. When I turn, Rosalie is staring down at us from a white horse.

“Hmph. You disposed of the remnants of the enemy’s army? The Roseguard Imperial Knights could have taken care of that without your help.”

I glare at Rosalie before Bhat suddenly chimes in.

“M-Madam Rosalie! We must tell them about *that*!”

“I—I know! You’re an irritating bunch, but I suppose I’ll tell you.”

Rosalie takes in a deep breath as if trying to calm herself down.

“...Are you listening? The legendary armor is being kept in a shrine near Izale village. You will need it to defeat the Demon Lord.”

“‘Legendary armor’...?”

Bhat nods.

“It is said that, in the days of yore, the great sage Mustaf prepared the armor, for he believed that one day a great danger would befall Gaeabrande. We were planning on telling you earlier, but we didn’t get the chance to once the flies attacked the fortress.”

“The people of Roseguard have been carefully watching over this sacred armor for generations just for this moment. Make sure to show some gratitude when you take it.”

Seiya quizzically responds:

“You better be telling the truth. This armor isn’t cursed or anything, right?”

“Did... Did you not listen to anything we just said? It’s legendary armor that the great sage prepared for us! The people of Roseguard have been watching over this sacred equipment for generations! There is no way it would be cursed!”

“It could be ‘the sacred, legendary, cursed armor’ for all I know.”

“...?! Don’t be ridiculous!”

Rosalie violently shakes her head after screaming.

“Why does the Hero have to be someone so morbidly paranoid...? This is the height of absurdity! That armor was meant for the strongest warrior—such as my father...!”

After her brief complaints, Rosalie tugs the reins and turns her horse around. Then she rides off without even glancing in our direction. Only Bhat and his men express their gratitude before disappearing into the distance as well.

“So, Seiya...”

I look back at Seiya.

“Since we’re going all the way back to Izale village to get that armor...how about resting for a bit while we’re there?”

We were originally planning on doing that after leaving the Dragons’ Den, but we were immediately summoned to fight the flies.

“Come on. We need to take a break every once in a while! Let’s just sit back and relax today!”

Elulu’s and Mash’s faces light up the moment I suggest it—Seiya’s, too, surprisingly.

“Okay. I’m running low on MP thanks to the magic bow, so let’s go to the inn and rest a bit.”

He genuinely agrees with me for a change. I don’t know if it’s because I’m tired, but I feel a little chilly, so I’m relieved to hear Seiya say that.

“Then to the village we go!”

I chant a spell and create a gate that will take us to Izale village. It’s a small town, but the warm atmosphere will surely bring us the peace and rest we need. However...the moment I open the gate and arrive at the village, I freeze.

...I wasn’t feeling chilly because I was exhausted. My goddess intuition was just trying to warn me.

The ravaged fields...

The horribly devastated houses...

Izale village has been destroyed.

Hero Slayer

Izale village is no more than a shell of its former self. For a moment, I thought I had created a gate taking us to the wrong place. The village looks as if it were hit by a powerful natural disaster.

“The hell happened here?!” Mash utters in a daze.

Elulu, on the other hand, is speechless and covers her mouth.

Did the Demon Lord’s army do this?! But why would they attack such a tiny village?!

Seiya simply points into the distance. When I follow his gaze, I see a pillar of smoke rising in the sky.

“Someone’s there, but it’s probably a trap. Be careful.”

Seiya has a point. It’s highly possible that whoever did this to the village is over there. We quietly begin advancing toward the smoke.

It becomes clear where the smoke is coming from when we get close enough. The dwarf’s item shop where we bought torches before is on fire.

“Guys...! L-look at that!”

Elulu strains her voice, and our eyes are immediately fixed on the monster beside the smoldering building. It’s a gigantic turtle with ashen, hard-looking skin underneath its rooflike shell. The monster closely resembles the Great Mother of Dragons in size after she transformed into a dragon. The turtle opens its mouth, baring its fangs, as it reaches out to kill the owner of the shop.

“Th-this isn’t good! It’s gonna kill that old dwarf!”

“We have to save him!”

Mash and I instinctively lunge forward, slipping in between the giant turtle and the shopkeeper.

“Are you okay, old man?!”

When Mash looks back, the plump dwarf puts on a smile and claims: “Yes, I’m fine. There is nothing to worry about. That monster won’t attack me, for I’m the one who summoned it.”

“...What?”

“Adamantoise. It’s a monster I summoned from another world.”

Before I even realize it, Seiya has already unsheathed the platinum sword. However, he is pointing the blade not at the monster but the dwarf.

“...Just who are you?”

With an unchanging, mirthful smile, the short dwarf introduces himself.

“A member of the Demon Lord’s army and one of the four generals... Summoner Kilkapul.”

“O-one of the four generals?!”

I grunt.

“Eek!”

Elulu takes a step back. Then Kilkapul gently rubs Adamantoise’s throat.

“Hero, I have been watching your success through my crystal ball ever since you first visited this village. And let me tell you: With awe-inspiring power like that, it’s almost hard to believe you’re human. You’re attentive and smart as well—a true threat to us.”

“So is that why you summoned that turtle?! To defeat Seiya?!”

“Oh no. This is for something else. I summoned Adamantoise for this...”

Kilkapul knocks on Adamantoise’s throat, causing the turtle to open its massive, fang-filled mouth. Immediately, something falls to the ground with a thud. The fragment that fell from the beast’s maw glitters even shinier than gold.

“The legendary armor in Mustaf’s shrine was created using adamantite, the strongest material on Gaeabrande—thus, it is also known as adamantite armor. Not even the Demon Lord’s attacks could destroy it. In fact, a way to destroy

the armor doesn't exist. That is, except for Adamantoise, whose body is made of the very same material."

"D-don't tell me you...!"

I cast my eyes down at the metal fragment that Adamantoise spit up.

"That's a fragment of the legendary armor that Adamantoise just ate. I broke the shrine's seal and destroyed the armor before you got here."

Wh-what?! Not only did we not get the monster power weapon Igzasion but the legendary armor was destroyed as well?! Does that mean we can no longer...?!

"The Demon Lord is the strongest being in the world. However, if even the slightest chance that you could defeat him exists, I am going to need you to die."

Adamantoise unleashes a mighty roar.

We brace ourselves in preparation for the attack, but Kilkapul cheerfully smiles while shaking his head. He places a hand on the monster's thick leg.

"Your work here is done. You may go."

Thereupon, the giant turtle starts fading out of existence as if it were dissolving.

"Wh-what...? Don't tell me that you plan on fighting Seiya yourself."

I send the tiny dwarf a piercing stare, but he calmly smiles as expected.

"Of course not. He isn't someone I can defeat. Of course, that goes for Adamantoise as well. I told you. I have been watching the Hero and studying him."

Kilkapul continues with a philosophical attitude.

"The final general after me, Eraser Kaiser—a god incarnate—boasts an attack and defense that exceed two hundred thousand. However, not even he would be able to defeat your Hero."

...Huh? Wh-what is this dwarf trying to say?

"I sense a strong power from the Hero that surpasses both logic and reason. It

is the same power possessed by the Demon Lord. It is hard to put into words, but you could call it the power to control the fate of the world—something that lackeys such as ourselves do not possess. That is why...”

Kilkapul picks up the two bundles by his side, then places them before us.

“Please have a look.”

I look inside the cloth, thinking he’s offering us fruit or something, when...

“Ahhhhhh!!”

Elulu screams. I am trembling internally, as well. Inside are the heads of the old woman and the small boy who we met before, at the item shop.

“These are the heads of my wife and son.”

“Th-this can’t be happening! These must be fake!” I cry out, but Kilkapul affectionately rubs the head of the young boy.

“He looks just like me, doesn’t he? These are the actual heads of my wife and son.”

“But why?! Why would you do such a thing?!”

“Because I must defeat the Hero at all costs...using the heads of the ones I love and the lives of the Izale villagers as catalysts to awaken my most powerful summoning sorcery...!”

I catch a glimpse of the madness hidden behind Kilkapul’s smile, which gives me chills.

“This isn’t normal! This is insane!”

“Yes, the only way to win is to stray from what is normal. That is the conclusion I came to, for that is how much of a threat this Hero is. Even monsters have emotions. It was heartbreaking. It was painful and nauseating. But even then, the Demon Lord said to me: *‘Kilkapul, you will be the one who kills the Hero.’* It was an honor. Of course, my wife and son understood and died for me. Please see for yourself. Look at the cheerful expressions on their faces. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Wh-what did you have to summon so badly that warranted all this?!”

“An evil that will defeat the Hero. Intelligence, talent, and even power are meaningless before it. Even the Igzasion you obtained at Dragon Village would be powerless.”

He even knows about Igzasion?! B-but at least it looks like he doesn't know this one is a fake!

“M-Master! We should probably take care of him now while we have the chance!”

“No, it's probably already too late. The summoning is going to happen regardless if we kill him or not. That's why he showed himself before us and isn't even worried.”

“That is correct. It is too late for anything... Crossed Thanatos, I call thee forth from another dimension. I offer the lives of the villagers, my loved ones, and even myself! Oh, one who is beyond concept, hear my calls! Arise unto me, God of Death!”

God of Death...?! Crossed...Thanatos?!

Kilkapul pulls a dagger out from his pocket and slits his throat!

“Wh-what...?!”

The sinister black monster blood spills out from his gaping wound and onto the ground, creating a puddle. With a fatal wound, the dwarf falls to his knees, but even then, he gazes up at the sky with a sense of satisfaction.

“Demon Lord...! Please transform this world...into the netherworld...we have longed...for...”

Kilkapul falls facedown onto the ground, never to move again.

“I-i-is he dead?”

Without even checking the body, Seiya whispers to me:

“Rista, open a gate to the spirit world.”

“What?! Now?! But nothing has happened yet!”

“Just do it. His confidence wasn't normal, so I'm telling you to open a gate just in case.”

“O-okay.”

But the moment I try, something suddenly crawls up out of the pool of black blood around Kilkapul's dead body. A jet-black shadow the same color as the blood instantly takes the form of a human.

“Th-this is Crossed Thanatos?! This is the God of Death that Kilkapul sacrificed his life to summon?!”

It's bizarre. A small body entirely hidden under a black robe. Like staring into the abyss, the part of his face that can be seen under the hood is pitch-black as well. And despite being called the God of Death, a giant iron cross is in his hand. I feel like there is something contradictory about the symbol of evil holding a holy cross.

I wonder how strong this ominous-looking God of Death actually is?

I use Scan on the enemy before my eyes...

Cr@ssd Tha ๙ tz8z

LV: umu?

[illegible]

ATK: %9rr6%87%

DEF: $\frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{dt} \right)$

SPD:

MAG: sQWp%df%dp%df

...

c80%..!

Resistance: $\frac{1}{\sigma} \ln \left(\frac{1}{1 - \sigma} \right)$

Special Abilities: E7s& <DSOKt-

Skills: 8T2e - ϕ $\div$ $\div$ $\parallel$ α $\frac{\partial}{\partial x}$ α

Personality:

“What...?”

Thinking I must be seeing things, I use Scan again, but I am still unable to decipher Crossed Thanatos's status.

"Wh-what is going on?! I can't see his stats! Is something like this even possible?! Seiya?!"

"It's all corrupted text for me as well."

"Could he be using Fake Out like you do?!"

"No, it doesn't appear to be that. Those are probably his actual stats."

"What?! This illegible gibberish?! B-but what does this mean?!"

"...It means it defies common sense."

While we are talking, Thanatos sticks the bottom of the large cross into the ground. Immediately, a massive fissure tears the ground apart.

"E-earth magic?!"

While I scream, the crevice shoots straight for Seiya with blistering speed before the crack tries to swallow him. However...before it can reach him, Seiya is already floating in the air!

Wh-whoa...! Even though he doesn't know what the enemy's abilities are, he still decides to float! What cautiousness!

But my admiration for Seiya's precognitive, overcautious demeanor is short-lived, for lightning immediately shoots out of the cracked ground! It's heading right for him!

As the lightning magic roars out of the surface...

"Double Wind Blade!"

Promptly unsheathing the platinum sword, Seiya cuts through the air with a double tempest strike, creating a gust of wind that changes the direction of the lightning. Then he immediately creates another tempest and launches it at Thanatos. As if he were taken by surprise, the God of Death is easily hit, and his body is split in two.

Mash and Elulu rush over to Seiya.

"Master Seiya! Are you okay?"

“I’m fine.”

“B-but what was that?! Lightning shot out of the ground! It doesn’t make any sense!”

Lightning magic that shoots out of the surface after earth magic is used... Elulu is right. That attack seems to have defied the laws of magic. But...

“At any rate, it looks like it’s dead.”

Despite my relief, Seiya is looking at the bisected God of Death with a piercing glare.

“Rista, what are you doing? Create a gate.”

“Huh? B-but—”

“Now. Create one and open it.”

“O-okay.”

When I finally create a gate and open it, Thanatos’s severed torso slowly rises into the air before his lower half instantly regenerates. To make matters even more surprising, his severed lower body creates a new upper body as well.

“The hell?! It split into two monsters!”

“Wh-what is going on?!”

One of the Death Gods immediately aims the cross at Seiya, shooting a ray of light similar to Shining Arrow! Seiya tilts his body to the side and dodges, but the other God of Death lifts its cross into the air and charges right for him! This time, it’s going to use the gigantic cross to hit Seiya with like a weapon. Seiya backsteps, creating a considerable amount of distance between them to dodge, but the cross expands. The ever-growing cross almost reaches Seiya’s chest until it suddenly comes to a complete stop. However, just when I think he missed, icicles begin to shoot out of the tip like bullets!

“Hmph...!”

Seiya grunts. He tries to knock the icicles away with his sword, but there are too many. A single crystal of ice hits Seiya in the stomach, powerfully knocking him back and causing him to roll on the ground.

“S-Seiya?!”

This is the first time I have ever seen Seiya hit by the enemy. However, he immediately gets back up to his feet and recovers.

The two Thanatoses slowly walk into each other as they head this way until they eventually merge back into one monster. After sheathing his sword, Seiya points both of his hands at Thanatos.

“Maximum Inferno...”

A furious explosion swallows Thanatos. Nothing can survive the power of that wicked Hellfire, but nevertheless, Seiya immediately rushes over to Mash as if he knows that won’t be enough to defeat the God of Death.

“Huh? Master...?”

Seiya lifts Mash up onto his shoulder, then hurls him into the gate I opened!

“Ahhh!”

Mash soars through the air before disappearing into the gate. Seiya immediately lifts up Elulu in the very same way...

“W-w-w-w-wait...!”

Then he swiftly pitches her into the gate just like Mash. Following this, Seiya charges at me as well.

I-is he going to throw me, too?! Okay! But be gentle! Also, if possible, I want you to hold me in your arms like a princess before lightly dropping me through the gate! Please...!

But Seiya kicks his right leg into the air. Then, at the very next moment, the ball of his long foot sinks into my stomach!

“Bwaaaaaafff!”

I am launched to the other side of the portal, nearly fainting in agony due to the vicious kick! Almost immediately following, Seiya plunges in after me. I immediately close the gate the moment we arrive in the unified spirit world.

Rolling around in the spirit world’s public square, I...

“Heeey!! What was that for?! Why am I the only one who gets treated like

garbage!!” I scream at Seiya, but he isn’t himself. He clutches his stomach where Thanatos hit him, then crouches down without saying a word.

“S-Seiya?! Are you okay?!”

“Yeah, somehow. But...I’ve been seriously wounded.”

I-I’m such an idiot! Seiya was severely injured by Thanatos’s attack and was just barely able to keep himself together to escape. And yet, he brought us with him even though he could have simply abandoned us.

“This is the first time I’ve taken damage. I have to heal.”

“Let me see the wound! I’ll heal you!”

“Be quick, if you can.”

Seiya takes off his armor and shows me the wound.

“...Huh?”

I’m taken aback. Seiya’s injury looks to be nothing more than some slightly red skin, as if his armor chafed his stomach.

“Um... Seiya? How much damage did you take? Like, give me the number of HP.”

Seiya puts on a distressed expression, then utters:

“I had 300,000 HP before, but now...I only have 299,900...”

“...?! What part of that is ‘seriously wounded’?!”

I try to point out how ridiculous he’s being, but Seiya’s face is the epitome of seriousness.

“I don’t feel comfortable not having max HP. At any rate, hurry up and heal me.”

While staggered by his usual overcautiousness and astonished that he has three hundred thousand HP, I use my magic to heal his scratch.

“Although it wasn’t much, I still can’t believe he was able to damage Master Seiya at all... Just what is that thing...?”

Elulu seems to agree as well.

“That was crazy. It’s like it ignored the laws of magic and the laws of nature...”

I can sense the fear from their voices, so I decide to cheer them up.

“For now, let’s just stay here until we come up with a plan! We’ll be safe here since the unified spirit world’s in another dimension!”

The moment those words slip off my tongue...gods and goddesses in the public square begin making a lot of noise.

“Wh-what is this feeling...?”

“Is this perchance...malice? Wh-what is going on?”

The gods and goddesses start looking around with panic-stricken expressions.

“Wh-what’s that?!”

I look in the direction that a god is pointing to find a black vortex appear over the fountain.

Th-th-this can’t be happening!

But my gut is right. From the black vortex, a giant iron cross emerges, and the God of Death soon comes crawling out after it!

“What?! It came all the way to the unified spirit world after us?!”

I was just trying to cheer up Mash and Elulu, but now I’m the one pale and shivering.

Th-that’s impossible! It can break through dimensions?! This creature... This is a mythic-class monster!

Now it’s Elulu and Mash who speak up as if to calm me down.

“B-b-but...! It doesn’t matter how frightening that thing is! All monsters have weaknesses, right?!”

“Y-yeah, Elulu! There’s no such thing as an invincible monster!”

Yeah! What am I freaking out about?! We have Seiya on our side! He’ll be able to do something about this monster! In fact, I bet he has already...

“Seiya! What’s Thanatos’s weakness? Surely, you’ve figured it out by now!”

Showered in our desperate gazes, the Hero softly mutters: “I don’t know.”

“““What?!”””

“...I have no idea how to defeat it.”

“S-Seiya?!”

“Master?!”

Ahhhhhh! Say it isn't soooooo! What happened to the confident Seiya I know?! We're screwed! We are completely screwed!

...The unified spirit world is filled with screams and cries at the appearance of the sudden monster.

...After it crawls out of the vortex, the God of Death picks up the cross, then slowly walks toward us. Just like the shrieking angels trying to run away in the public square, our minds go blank as well.

Gate of Valhalla

The God of Death, Crossed Thanatos, is drawing near, ripping through dimensions to find Seiya. We helplessly shrink back.

However, a ray of light appears in the midst of the emerging darkness.

“Stop right there, creature of darkness.”

Before Thanatos stand numerous deities, speaking with strong voices as they surround the supremely evil being in the public square.

“I do not know where you wandered here from...”

“...But this is no place for evil such as yourself.”

“You shall perish for your sin!”

Whoa! The Goddess of Wind, Fraala; the God of Lightning, Orand; and the God of Ice, Kiorne! Three well-known deities have come to help! Looks like we got lucky! They’ll take care of that monster for us!

As if they are trying to live up to my expectations, Fraala casts a wind spell, Orand throws a bolt of lightning, and Kiorne shoots a crystal of ice...but Thanatos continues its methodical approach as if nothing happened.

“N-nothing’s working on it!”

Fire doesn’t work and neither does wind, lightning, or ice! Does any magic work on this thing?!

“Hey...Ristie...”

There is a hint of worry in Elulu’s voice. I want to tell her everything is going to be okay, but I’m not even confident I can force a smile onto my face right now. I hesitate when...

“Rista! Rista, you in there!”

Now Mash is shaking me.

“Look! Master Seiya’s...!”

“Huh...?”

When I look in the direction they’re pointing, I see Seiya already hastily running away without us.

“...?! Th-that jerk...! Where do you think you’re going?”

We chase after Seiya, who appears to be running in the direction of the sanctuary... *Hold up. I’m getting some serious déjà vu!*

“Wait up for us, you jerk!”

But even then, Seiya doesn’t slow down. When he arrives at the sanctuary, he throws open the door and dives in.

I arrive at the sanctuary’s entrance, struggling to catch my breath. Curious, I suddenly look back and find that Thanatos is already close behind, dodging the deities’ magic while floating in the air.

“Eek! Ristie, he’s right behind us!”

“H-hurry! Get inside!”

After plunging inside, we immediately close the entrance door. Thereupon, I hear footsteps. When I look up, I see Seiya running up the staircase to the second floor. However, right as I try to follow him, the entrance bursts open with a *bang* and the God of Death comes in.

“Eeeeeep! He even followed us into the sanctuary!”

But a god with masculine features standing near the door steps in front of the God of Death as if he were a guard.

“Begone evil! How dare you step foot inside the sanctuary! I, Arx—God of the Fist—will crush you into a fine powder with my unrivaled— Blaaargh!!”

“Y-you shall pay for what you did to Arx! I—the God of Sumo—shall be your next opponent! Divine Hundred Hand Sla— Blaaargh!!”

One after another, various gods within the sanctuary valiantly challenge Thanatos, but unsurprisingly, nothing works. They’re at least doing a good job

slowing him down. We sprint up the stairs.

“Seiya! Come on, wait for us!”

We somehow eventually manage to catch up with him.

“That monster is essentially only going to target me. All you three need to do is hide somewhere.”

“W-we’re not going to abandon you!”

Even after making it to the second floor, Seiya doesn’t stop running down the hallway. That’s when an all-too-familiar muscular man with a beard appears before him. While holding a platter with a large cake, Cerceus says: “Hey! I see you’re back already! Check this out! I just baked a cake using a new recipe! I spent a lot of time and effort making this delicious, marvel—”

“I don’t care. Move.”

While Cerceus pridefully holds out his cake, Seiya pushes it back right into his face. Cerceus screams, “My caaaaaake!” before falling to the ground. After that, Mash, Elulu, and I run past Cerceus and his cake-covered face.

H-how horrible! I’m definitely going to eat the next cake he bakes to make it up to him!

Once that’s decided, we run into yet another goddess. The hunched-over recluse and Goddess of War, Adenela, smiles with unhealthy bags under her eyes.

“S-S-Seiya...! Y-you came back to me!”

Seiya stops before Adenela and says:

“Adenela, I need you to stop that monster following me. If you do that, I’ll make sure to spend some time with you on my next visit.”

“What...? R-r-r-r-really...?!”

Adenela unsheathes her sword, then glares at the nearing evil.

“I-I’ll protect y-you, Seiya!”

She gets into a unique stance as if she is drawing a circle.

“F-feast your eyes on this...! Ultimate...Eternal Sword...!”

After sliding in range of Thanatos, Adenela swings her sword, creating afterimages of the blade just like Seiya’s Double Eternal Sword or maybe even greater! Adenela repeatedly slashes his body in the blink of an eye.

Whoa...! I guess that’s the real thing for you! Her speed and power are incredible!

But each slash splits Thanatos into another monster. Two bodies become four. Four bodies become eight. Eight bodies become sixteen. Sixteen become...

Unable to take any more, I yell out to Adenela: “You’re creating more monsters! Stop!”

But Adenela continues to attack as she looks over at me with a troubled expression.

“I—I can’t...stop...h-halfway through...the move...”

Seiya pats me on the shoulder.

“She’s useless. Just as I expected. Come on, let’s get out of here.”

H-how rude can you be?! I think that to myself, yet we leave Adenela behind and start to run off. Concerned, I look back—only to find her being crushed by so many Death Gods that they almost fill the entire hallway. But eventually, the Thanatos in the middle absorbs and merges with the others before coming after us again.

N-not even Adenela, the Goddess of War, can defeat it?! Wh-what are we gonna do?!

After running all the way across the long passage, Seiya sprints up the staircase to the third floor.

“Seiya! Aimlessly running away isn’t going to help!”

Before I even know it, I find myself panicking as the invincible monster slowly closes in on us.

“Ugh! What are we going to dooo?!”

When I cry out on the verge of tears, Seiya looks back at me.

“Rista. Relax.”

“I can’t! I mean, you said it yourself! You have no idea how to beat that thing! How do you expect me to relax at a time like this?!”

Seiya speaks with his usual indifferent tone despite our impending doom.

“Yes, I did say I have no idea how I’m going to defeat it. But I have already come up with a way to deal with enemies who I don’t know how to defeat.”

“...What?”

“I heard she likes to paint, despite her appearance.”

“Huh? What are you talking about? Who is ‘she’?”

“She apparently enjoys painting on the rooftop of the sanctuary, gazing over its one-sided view of the spirit world.”

“Okay? So who is it?”

Before I even know it, I am at the top of the staircase. Seiya places a hand on the door up ahead.

“R-Ristie! Seiya! It’s too late! He’s right behind us!” Elulu yells out behind us almost simultaneously as Seiya opens the door wide.

The moment it opens, a strong gust of wind blows by, shaking my bangs. On the moderately slanted stone rooftop of the sanctuary is a goddess.

“Th-that’s...!”

Just as Seiya said, she doesn’t look like she’d enjoy painting. The Goddess of Destruction, Valkyrie, wears only chains around her chest and lower body. She stares hard at the canvas with a paintbrush in hand. Valkyrie is so focused on her work, she doesn’t even notice us.

“W-wait, Seiya! Are you telling me that you plan on getting the strongest goddess in the spirit world to fight Thanatos?!”

“Exactly. But judging by what I know about her, she wouldn’t help us even if I begged. That’s why...”

The door flies open, and Thanatos springs out onto the rooftop. As Seiya faces him, the God of Death extends his cross, launching it at Seiya. After briefly

glancing back, Seiya dodges the attack at the very last second. The cross continues growing until it rams right into Valkyrie's canvas and skewers her painting.

"Perfect. It worked," Seiya quietly whispers.

H-how cruel can he be?! He purposely got Thanatos to destroy her painting?!

"No... It can't be... I was... I was so close to finishing it..."

The cross piercing the canvas shrinks, returning to its wielder. Thereupon, Valkyrie glares menacingly at the culprit, then slowly stands. A silver, fierce aura emits from her body.

"Look what you did, ya little shit! I'm gonna tear those limbs off one by one and cave that stupid, tiny head of yours in with them!"

Her undignified words echo throughout the spirit world.

"Get over here. You don't want to be too close."

Seiya gestures for us to come over to the corner of the rooftop. When I walk over to him, I look back out of curiosity to see what's happening and find Valkyrie already holding Thanatos's head in her hand.

Sh-she's fast...! How did she do that?!

"Drop dead, you worthless grunt..."

The aura enveloping Valkyrie's body instantly expands as it gathers in her right hand, which is holding Thanatos's head.

"First Valkyrja: Shattered Break!"

Whoaaa! So this is the Goddess of Destruction's special attack?! I-it looks strong!

...But nothing happens. After a few moments, Thanatos's body turns into smoke, only to slowly disperse like mist. Escaping from Valkyrie's grasp, the God of Death materializes a short distance away from her.

"What? A ghost, huh? Tch. All right, bring it on!"

Valkyrie promptly places a hand on the chain around her chest.

“First Valkyrja: Astral Break!”

The chain slithers through the air like a snake before wrapping around Thanatos, tying him up.

W-wow...! She has a move that can be used against ghosts, too?! That's amazing! She can handle any type of opponent like this! Now, she'll surely be able to...!

However, a black aura oozes out of Thanatos's body, instantly turning the chain around his body into ash. Along with it, the links covering Valkyrie's chest shatter as well, thus breaking her posture.

What the...?! N-nothing is working! Not even the Goddess of Destruction can defeat this thing?! I fall into despair like never before.

I can't believe that not even the strongest goddess in the spirit world can defeat him! He has no weaknesses! This is the perfect life-form that transcends all! There isn't anything in the universe that can defeat it!

“Hee-hee... Ha-ha-ha-ha... Heh-heh-heh-heh...”

After suddenly dropping to her knees. Valkyrie begins laughing. However, before long, her laughter turns into rage as the blood rushes to her face.

“Order! Ishtar...!”

Her roar shakes the heavens.

Order?! She's going to unlock her goddess power!

Valkyrie's silver aura instantly transforms into a blinding white light, signaling that she has received Great Goddess Ishtar's permission.

J-just how much stronger is Order going to make her?!

I use Scan on Valkyrie...and gasp.

GODDESS OF DESTRUCTION, VALKYRIE

LV: 999

HP:	MP:			
99,999,999	9,999,999			
ATK:	DEF:	SPD:	MAG:	GRW:
9,999,999	9,999,999	9,999,999	9,999,999	999

Resistance: Fire, Wind, Water, Lightning, Ice, Earth, Holy, Dark, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Curse, Instant Death, Status Ailments

Special Abilities: Status Limit Break

Skills: Valkyrja

Personality: Fearless

Wh-what incredible stats! So this is the true power of the strongest warrior in the unified spirit world!

I’m sure Seiya also saw. He faintly nods to himself by my side.

“No other deity even comes close. But, well, I suppose it’s only natural for gods to transcend the limits of human understanding.”

I have never seen such limit-breaking stats before! But even then, she’s still fighting a legendary monster that is immune to all attacks. We watch the battle with bated breath, wondering what the Goddess of Destruction will do.

After letting out a deep sigh, Valkyrie softly places her left hand over her right wrist, then points it at Thanatos. Thereupon, an overwhelming aura that could swallow the entire unified spirit world bursts out of her body.

“Take this...! Omega Valkyrja: Gate of Valhalla!”

I unintentionally imagine that something will shoot out of her hand, but I’m wrong. A thick miasma rises into the air as a monstrous gate appears over Valkyrie’s head. There’s a gypsum statue of a goddess’s face on the top of the ancient gate.



Is this summoning magic?! I bet she's summoning something to come out of the gate!

The black gate isn't made of bars, so what's inside is shrouded in mystery. But before long, the gate slowly begins to open, releasing the miasma along with it. When the mist clears, I can finally see what's inside, leaving me aghast. Behind the gate's doors, a creature robed in black and carrying an iron cross appears—the God of Death that transcends conception—Crossed Thanatos.

Mash and Elulu shriek in astonishment.

“What?! Wh-why?! Why was Thanatos behind the gate?!”

“Don't tell me that it split into two again?!”

But there are no copies of Thanatos around. The only God of Death is the one standing behind the gate... And it's the one who has been fighting Valkyrie!

“Wh-what kind of attack is that?!”

The instant I mutter that, the eyes of the gypsum goddess statue open atop the gate. What I thought was an inanimate object drips crimson blood from its mouth.

“Gi-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh!”

Eerie laughter echoes as if from the pits of hell. I look at the goddess statue cackling as blood pours not only from its mouth but the eyes as well.

“...?! What is that?!”

I think I just wet myself a little.

Thanatos tries to crawl out of the gate, but the black door gradually closes along with the laughter. Countless spikes attached to the inside of the door slowly pierce the invincible God of Death, crackling and popping as if bones are being broken.

“Aaa...aaaaaa...”

I suddenly hear what sounds like a groan coming from Thanatos's face—the deep abyss. Then...

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

The God of Death, who I thought was void of emotion, starts to scream! But even Thanatos's cries are drowned out by the insane laughter of the bloody goddess statue.

"Gi-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh!"

Clang!

The door to the gate shuts along with a heavy *clank*. Then a few moments go by as the miasma clouding around the gate disappears almost simultaneously as the portal itself fades out of existence.

In the midst of our silence, Valkyrie mutters: "The moment it transcends the law of causality and opens, it swallows the enemy without exception. That is the Gate of Valhalla."

Goddess of Destruction

“All things return to their origin after being crushed by the Spikes of Destruction. There are no exceptions.”

The Gate of Valhalla...! I can't believe such a "cheat" exists!

While I tremble with fear before the menacing attack that destroyed the “invincible” God of Death, Valkyrie suddenly falls to one knee.

“V-Valkyrie...?”

Worried, I approach her. She is breathing heavily as if she were in pain.

“Stay back, Ristarte. Thirty seconds have already passed. It's almost time.”

“Thirty seconds...? Almost time for what? Wh-what's going to happen?”

Out of nowhere, red liquid begins spurting out of Valkyrie's right shoulder, covering my face. I wipe off the sticky substance with my hand, look down, and scream: “I-is this...? Is this blood?!”

Her arms, legs, stomach—every area on her body is covered in gashes, spewing out blood as if she were cut with something sharp.

“Eeeeeep!”

Elulu and I tremble at the sudden gruesome sight. While covered in blood, Valkyrie explains: “Valhalla's Gate...uses the caster's life force as a catalyst—enough life force to kill a human...without fail.”

While speaking with a stammer, Valkyrie suddenly coughs up blood before collapsing to the ground like a marionette that had its strings cut.

“V-Valkyrie?! Are you okay?!”

But when I try to wake her up, she suddenly adopts an expression dripping with ecstasy.

“Shit... I—I could get addicted to this...! This feels so good!”

“...! I thought you were a sadist, but you’re a masochist?!”

I mean, just how many perverts are there in this spirit world?!

It was stupid of me to ever worry in the first place. *Disgusting*. Seiya, on the other hand, seems pleased as he watches by my side.

“Looks like she didn’t use Order to awaken that move but to survive the kickback.”

Seiya’s eyes are a different color while he gazes at Valkyrie. It looks like he’s using Scan. Curious about her HP myself, I use Scan as well.

GODDESS OF DESTRUCTION, VALKYRIE

HP: 3,198,512/99,999,999

She lost that much HP?! Seiya was right! ...Hmm? Wh-what the...? What’s this feeling...?

While preoccupied thinking about Valkyrie’s status, my chest suddenly feels weird. Valkyrie is no longer lying on the ground anymore, either...because she apparently sneaked around behind me and is now fondling my breasts!

“Ahhh?!”

“Ristarte! You’re the one who summoned that piece of shit, aren’t you?! Don’t lie to me!”

“Y-yes, I mean, in a way...b-but anyway...could you...stop...g-groping my... breasts?!”

To make matters worse, Mash and Elulu are watching, too! *Ahhh!*

“My painting got destroyed! I mean, look at this!”

Valkyrie shows me her ruined work of art with one hand while fondling a breast with the other. The painting on the canvas looks like something a toddler drew with their nondominant hand, while lying down. It’s so ridiculously bad

that, for a moment, I completely forgot that she is vigorously groping my boobs.

“You’re gonna pay me back for destroying my greatest masterpiece before I could even finish it! Lemme squeeze your bare tits!”

She’s trying to stuff her hand into my dress!

“My bare what?! Y-you’re joking, right?! H-hey! Noooooo!”

But no matter how much time goes by, Valkyrie’s hand doesn’t reach my chest. Perplexed, I look back and find Seiya tightly holding her wrist.

S-Seiya?! Are you trying to protect me?! Oh, Seiya...! You might not admit it, but you really do like me, don’t you? I’m right, aren’t I? You like me, huh? All right, then! It looks like we both have feelings for each other! Sigh... Okay, you win. Just this once though, okay? Next time we’re alone, I’ll let you touch my bare breasts.♪

However...

“Gwaaah?!”

Seiya kicks my butt as hard as he can. It’s so powerful that my underpants are completely exposed as I roll on the ground.

“What do you think you’re doing?!”

Without even glancing at me as I scream, Seiya shoots Valkyrie a penetrating look. It appears he wasn’t trying to save me but simply get rid of me.

“Valkyrie. You’re the one. Only you are worthy of training me.”

“Huh? ‘Train’...? You saw me fight. All my moves are like that. Every move comes at a price.”

“That’s fine.”

After fixing my dress, I stand up and yell:

“Seiya?! Do you seriously plan on training in the spirit world *again*?! You *just* learned archery from Mitis! Don’t you think you’re prioritizing training a little too much lately?!”

“Might as well train now that we’re here. Besides, we can’t continue like this. The enemies are gradually getting stronger, so I have to train more.”

He's right about that. Not even Seiya would have been able to defeat Thanatos if it weren't for Valkyrie. So it would be safe to assume that the upcoming battles will be as difficult or even more difficult than the God of Death. Seiya was unable to obtain the strongest sword, Igzasion; neither was he able to get the legendary armor. Maybe having him learn from the strongest goddess in the spirit world really is our only chance to save Gaeabrande.

"But Valkyrie said humans who use Valhalla's Gate will die! No exceptions!"

That moment, a sharp pain shoots through my butt once more.

"Haooffff?!"

I let out a scream unbecoming a goddess while rubbing my aching cheeks. When I turn around, Valkyrie is looking at me with a furrowed brow.

"When did I ever say I'd help? I don't plan on teaching my destructive techniques to anyone. Besides, they're not something you can learn through instruction."

Seiya glares at Valkyrie.

"Don't jump to conclusions."

"It's impossible. There's no way for humans to learn these techniques."

"How about trying and seeing for yourself?"

"...You just don't know when to give up, do you?"

Valkyrie scratches her head, messing up her silver hair as if she were annoyed by Seiya not backing down.

"Listen, you keep going on and on about training, but...have you seriously not realized it yet?"

"What are you talking about?"

All of a sudden, Seiya appears taken aback.

"I'm talking about you. You still don't get it? Then let me show you. First—"

...I unexpectedly hear the sound of a sword being drawn, and before I even realize it, Seiya is pointing his sword at Valkyrie's throat.

“The hell do you think you’re doing?” Valkyrie says in a threatening voice, causing me to panic.

“S-Seiya?! What’s gotten into you?!”

However, Seiya continues to stare at Valkyrie like a hawk.

“There is no reason to bring that up right now.”

“Oh...? So you *did* realize it?”

“That’s why I said I wanted to train with you.”

“I see. So because, you know, you... Interesting.”

They stare at each other in silence for a few moments.

Huh...? Wh-what are they talking about? W-wait. Did Valkyrie’s intuition as a goddess tell her that Seiya doesn’t have the equipment we need to defeat the Demon Lord?

I wait for the turn of events with bated breath until Valkyrie’s lips suggestively curl upward.

“I see. He isn’t your run-of-the-mill Hero. He may very well be able to learn my destructive techniques, even if only slightly.”

Then Seiya lowers his sword, and Valkyrie’s smirk turns into a scowl.

“But I’m still not going to teach you Gate of Valhalla. Got it?”

“The other moves should suffice.”

Valkyrie turns on her heel; then without looking back at us, she says: “Be in my room in ten minutes.”

After she leaves, I mutter:

“*Sigh...* More training? I should have known. I really wanted to relax today, though...”

Mash and Elulu simultaneously tug at my sleeves.

“Hey, Rista! You think we could go to Aria’s place to train, too, then? I want to continue our training from last time!”

“I wanna go with you! I can’t wait to learn some new magic!”

I figured they'd be sick of training since all they got to do was clean up fly carcasses last time, but...they're really fired up. How innocent they are. But hey...that's a good thing.

"Of course, you can. I'm sure Aria will be thrilled to help as well. Have fun, you two."

After giving them permission, they wave good-bye before darting off, leaving only Seiya and myself on the rooftop. I let out a deep sigh.

"Whew... Looks like you're learning destruction moves next, huh? I guess it's not like you have much of a choice, though. After all, we weren't able to get the sword or armor. *Sigh*... I don't know. I get that this is an S-ranked world, but sometimes it feels like this is unreasonable, y'know? Nearly impossible even."

Since nobody else is around, I decide to complain a little to Seiya. But even then, he doesn't join in. In fact, he pushes me ever further away when he says: "Complaining isn't going to solve anything. Our only option is to do the best we can with what we have."

Seiya suddenly sticks his hand out before me, revealing something in the palm of his open hand.

"It's a fragment of the legendary armor. I picked it up when we were at Izale village."

"Is that the piece of armor that fell out of that giant Adamantoise's mouth? What are you going to do with that?"

"I won't be able to make armor with something as small as this. However..."

Seiya unsheathes the platinum sword-plus, then places the Adamantoise fragment on the blade. From there, he takes some familiar strands of hair from his pocket and places them on the blade as well. The sword immediately begins to shine even brighter.

"Synthesizing it with the sword could be promising."

The radiating light calms, revealing an awe-inspiring, divine sword in his hand that almost appears to be glowing itself.

"I'll call it the Adamantitor. It probably won't work on the Demon Lord, but

it's the strongest weapon there is at the moment."

"S-Seiya... I—I can't believe you just...!"

My heart begins racing as I gaze at the sword, which is glowing even brighter than gold. I almost feel as if Seiya could turn any disadvantage around and gain the upper hand.

I impulsively wrap my arm around his.

"When life gives Seiya lemons, he makes lemonade! I knew you were the one, Seiya! I'm counting on you!"

"...Rista, let go."

Seiya acts annoyed, but I refuse to let go.

"Hee-hee! There's nothing to feel embarrassed about! We're a team!"

"...I told you to let go."

"Not happening! Look at you, hiding locks of my hair in your pocket! Oh, Seiya! I'm only fine with it because it's you!"

I raise my fist into the air, pretending like I'm mad at him as if we were in a romantic comedy. I am definitely not angry, though! If anything, I want to hug him!

"Rista..."

"Hmm? Yes, my dear?"

Somewhere deep within my heart, I always hoped we would end up together like this. However, Seiya looks at me with a dead-serious expression and states: "You smell. Get away from me."

"...! You're joking, right?! Do I really stink that badly?! How do I smell?!"

"...Sour."

"That's some serious BO! I-I'm gonna go take a bath!"

"Knock yourself out. I'm going to go train with Valkyrie."

My dreams of being in a lovey-dovey romcom scenario are crushed the moment he tells me I smell sour. After Seiya and I go our separate ways, I rush

over to the giant bathhouse in the sanctuary until I run into Cerceus in the hallway. Steam rises from his body as if he has just had a bath.

“Oh. Hey, Cerceus. You just take a bath, too?”

I figure he ought to be refreshed after a nice bath, but he unexpectedly appears to be in a bad mood.

“Heh-heh-heh... I was just washing the cake off my face. I never expected to have my greatest work...heh...smashed into my face. Funny, right? I mean—hilarious.”

Cerceus chuckles with a self-deprecating air, so I decide to join him.

“Ha-ha! So, um... Did it taste good?”

“...?! No! The cake I worked so hard on was shoved right into my face! I was heartbroken! And just between you and me, I cried!”

“R-really? Sorry about that.”

After a short sigh, Cerceus speaks up as if he suddenly remembered something.

“By the way, I heard that Great Goddess Ishtar is looking for you.”

“What?! She was? I—I wonder why...”

“Maybe she’s mad at you for luring that monster into the spirit world?”

“Ack...! D-do you really think so?”

“You should hurry up and find her.”

I was so looking forward to taking a bath, though... Even so, I change directions and head to Ishtar’s room.

After knocking, I tell her I’m coming in and open the large door. The highest-ranking deity of the unified spirit world—Great Goddess Ishtar—is sitting in her chair, knitting as usual.

“Thank you for coming, Ristarte.”

Her calm expression slightly eases my nerves.

“I—I heard you were looking for me? Is it about that monster?”

“Oh, that? That wasn’t your fault. It came after you on its own, right? Besides, Valkyrie took care of it. It isn’t a problem.”

“Then why did you wish to see me...?”

Her knitting hands pause.

“It would seem that the last general of the Demon Lord’s army has already started to make a move. The Demon Lord’s army is getting ready to attack the capital.”

“What?!”

I almost immediately ask her if she’s sure, but I catch myself. The Great Goddess Ishtar can see into the near future, so being sure about it is a given.

“Rista, now is the moment of truth.”

“I will do my best!”

“By the way...is Seiya Ryuuguuin currently training under Valkyrie?”

“Y-yes, he is... I-is that bad?”

“Valkyrie’s techniques of destruction... I assume this is your last resort since you were unable to obtain Igzasion and the adamantite armor?”

It appears nothing really does get past Ishtar.

“I do not think it is possible for a mere human to learn Valkyrie’s techniques. However, that Hero is a different story.”

Wow! The Great Goddess acknowledges Seiya’s talent! I’m so proud of my Hero!

“Nevertheless, there isn’t much time before the last general invades the capital. When the time comes, I request that you please head back to Gaeabrande immediately. I will allow you to open a gate near the capital, Roseguard, due to the urgent nature of the matter.”

“Th-thank you very much!”

Just as I express my gratitude and turn to leave the room...

“Rista. Is that man, Seiya Ryuuguuin, strong?”

I return her sudden query with a smile.

“Yes! He’s by far the strongest Hero I have ever met! I can’t even express how relieved I get whenever I hear him tell me that he’s perfectly prepared after training! Gaeabrande is a rough world, but I just know I will be able to save it with Seiya by my side!”

There is no hesitation in my words. However, she turns her gaze at me with a slightly stern look in her eye.

“Ristarte, you will soon come to know Seiya Ryuuguuin’s *true strength*.”

“Huh? His ‘true strength’...?”

What does that mean? Seiya’s already more than strong enough if you ask me...

After puzzling over her words for a few moments, I look Ishtar in the eyes, only to discover that her gentle expression has returned.

“I apologize for keeping you from your bath. Now, please hurry along and get cleaned up. You are starting to smell of vinegar, perhaps due to your long journey.”

Things Left Unsaid

The next morning, I wake up in my bed, only to discover my entire body is sore. I briefly wonder why, but...oh yeah. I scrubbed the life out of my body yesterday when I took a bath. After lavishing myself with perfume, I put on my white dress that I just washed.

All right! Perfect! Nobody's going to tell me I smell sour now!

I open the door and start walking down the sanctuary's corridor until I run into Valkyrie with her canvas and paintbrush. When I ask her about it, she says she's in the middle of her break and is going to paint—paint complete and utter garbage, I might add.

"So, Valkyrie, how is Seiya doing?"

"...What are you smiling about?"

Huh?! I'm smiling? B-but, I mean, why wouldn't I be? Usually, people tell Seiya that something is impossible for a human to do, yet he always masters it by the next day! Valkyrie replies with a quick "hmph."

"It's just like you thought. He's one of a kind. He's already learned a few of my techniques."

"I knew it! Heh!"

I grin from ear to ear until...

"What are you grinning about?!"

Bang! Valkyrie hits me on the head!

"O-ouch! But come on...! Admit it! He's a prodigy! Am I right?!"

"Not even getting hit discourages you, huh?"

She gives a snort of disgust, then quietly says:

“He does have a natural gift, but it will take more than that to learn my destruction techniques. Listen, Ristarte...”

Valkyrie makes a stern face before uttering:

“It’s a problem of determination.”

“Determination?”

I wasn’t expecting her to say that. *“Determination”? Seiya’s determination? What does that mean?*

“You could learn from him.”

“Ah?!”

A jolt of pain suddenly shoots through my glutes. After kicking me in the butt, Valkyrie heads toward the rooftop.

Can everyone please stop *literally* kicking my ass?! A-anyway, it looks like everything’s going okay with Seiya as usual.

I head over to Aria’s room after that. As I quietly open the door, I see Mash and Elulu sitting side by side while meditating.

Noticing me, Aria gently claps to get their attention and smiles.

“How about we take a short break?”

While Aria is preparing tea, I ask Elulu and Mash how their training is going.

“Hmm... It’s hard to describe, but I feel like I am on the verge of unlocking all the power in my body...”

“Me, too! I’m feeling good about this!”

They’re exuberant. It looks like the training’s paying off.

“I can’t wait to back up Seiya in battle!”

Elulu suddenly puts on an innocent smile. Mash nods in agreement as well.

“Same here! Even if it only happens once, I want to do something to help Master Seiya out!”

After chatting for a while over the tea Aria made, I start feeling slightly uncomfortable and leave.

...Mash and Elulu are really training hard.

...And Seiya is searching for a way to defeat the Demon Lord without relying on the holy sword or legendary armor.

A feeling similar to frustration begins to arise within my heart.

After returning to my room, I think to myself for a while...then finally make up my mind.

All right, that's it! I've made my decision! I can't sit around and do nothing while they're all working so hard! I'm going to do it!

Three days have gone by since we came to the spirit world. Today, Mash and Elulu are smiling, no, beaming with joy in Aria's room.

"Hmm? Did something good happen?"

Aria says with a note of joy in her voice, "Rista, their training is complete."

"What?! Do you mean...?!"

"Yes. Mash can completely turn into a dragon now, while Elulu has mastered Quick, a new support spell."

"Good job, guys!"

I shower them with praise as they blush. However, Aria directs her gaze to them with a somewhat serious look on her face.

"Elulu, Haste's advanced version, Quick, is a high-level move that still exceeds your level, so you will only be able to use it once a day. You must use it wisely!"

"I will! Thanks, Aria!"

"Mash, the same goes for you, too. You were able to unlock a seal that normally takes years to break. Every time you transform into a dragon, you will be unable to use the move again for a few hours."

"All right, got it!"

At any rate, Mash and Elulu have improved so much quicker than I thought! All that's left is Seiya, but I'm sure he's ready!

Before I even realize it, Aria is staring at me with a worried look in her eyes.

“Hey, Rista? According to what Adenela told me...Seiya and Valkyrie have been confined in her room together for days.”

“Hmm? But isn’t that normal?”

“It could be, but...I have no idea what Valkyrie could be thinking. You should probably go check up on him. I know it’s unlikely, but we wouldn’t want a repeat of what happened with Mitis.”

“Ahhh! Are you saying that Valkyrie might try to have her way with Seiya?! Th-that’s impos—”

That’s totally possible!

Suddenly stricken with worry, I fly out of Aria’s room.

“R-Rista, wait!”

“Ristie!”

Elulu and Mash chase after me.

I make a mad dash to Valkyrie’s room.

“Sorry! I’m coming in!”

I vigorously force the door open without even knocking...

“!!”

...and witness something truly unbelievable.

In the center of the spacious, modest room is a double bed containing Seiya and Valkyrie, nude in each other’s arms.

“Wh-wh-wh-what do you two think you’re doiiaaiaing?!”

I scream. However, they simply continue staring into one another’s eyes, only a hairbreadth apart, as if I don’t even exist. With burning crimson cheeks, she affectionately whispers: “I’ve never felt this way before.”

Seiya passionately gazes back at her.

“Me neither.”

I rush over, interrupting their pillow talk before forcefully peeling Seiya off Valkyrie.

“Rista, what are you doing?”

“That’s what I should be asking you! And here I thought you were training hard this whole time! J-just hurry up and put on your underpants!”

“What are you talking about? This is training.”

“What part of this is training?! At what point did I tell you to train up your skills in bed?!”

I lean in even closer to Seiya so that Valkyrie can’t hear.

“D-did she force you to do this like Mitis tried to? She did, didn’t she?! Oh, Seiya!”

“No, it’s not like that. It’s consensual.”

“I-i-it’s what?! Does that mean you and Valkyrie are...?!”

My mouth is moving, but no words come out. I look back at Valkyrie. She appears to be in a daze with her gently sloping breasts still out.

“Oh... Look what...I’ve done...”

“So you admit it! You did *do* it!”

I—I can’t believe they did it! They’ve crossed the line! Nothing is more prohibited than sexual acts between goddesses and humans! If Ishtar finds out...!

“Don’t worry. I’ll tell Ishtar myself. She won’t complain if I apologize.”

Well, we would at least be able to avoid the worst-case scenario—Seiya being sent back—if she did that. But that’s not the issue here.

With a roar of anger, I tell off the second-highest-ranking goddess in all the spirit world.

“What were you thinking?!”

“Don’t blame me. He’s a good man. I didn’t have any other choice.”

I almost faint when I hear how straightforward she is with her feelings.

“B-but goddesses and humans mustn’t engage in sexual relationships! It’s prohibited!”

“Huh? The hell are you talkin’ about? ...Tch. This is why you’ll always be a third-rate goddess.”

“D-did you just call me...a third-rate goddess...?”

I finally snap.

“A filthy slut of a goddess such as yourself has no right to speak to me like that!”

“Ristarte! You little...!”

She grabs my lapels, but I don’t back down.

“I-I’m doing my best, too, you know! I mean, look! I put a lot of work into preparing this for Seiya today!”

I show her a small bundle wrapped in cloth that I was planning on giving Seiya. Valkyrie takes it out of my hands with a quizzical stare before opening it over the palm of her hand.

“...What the hell is this? A straw figure...? Nah, it looks like you wove it with some sort of golden thread...”

Valkyrie’s expression slowly changes as she stares hard at the doll.

“W-wait! Ristarte...! Don’t tell me this is made out of...!”

“Yep! I plucked a lot of hair off my head and made it! I call it the Ristarte Hair Doll!”

“...?! I don’t care what you call it! Have you lost your mind?! How can you just give someone something like this with a straight face?!”



Valkyrie throws the Ristarte Hair Doll at me.

“I’m not playing around! Pulling out all these hairs really hurt, but I did it for Seiya!”

“Wh-what kind of deranged goddess are you?!”

“This isn’t like that! This is really going to come in handy!”

The way Valkyrie looks at me changes.

“I never knew Ristarte was this sick in the head... I—I should probably stop squeezing her tits...”

They were the eyes one has when regarding a degenerate with disgust. Then from behind me: “R-Rista, are you being serious...?”

“Ristie... I mean... This is just... You know?”

Mash and Elulu sound as if they are slowly drawing away from me.

Wh-why is everyone acting like this?! I was just trying to make synthesis more convenient for him...!

I gaze once more at the present in my hand.

Seiya is trying to master techniques of destruction to defeat the Demon Lord... Elulu and Mash both desperately wish to help with whatever they can as well... That’s why I thought I should try to do something...

That’s when my brain, which is stuck in a state of distress, suddenly returns to normal.

Ah?! What is this?! A doll made out of my hair?! Am I an idiot?! What was I thinking?! I must have gone mad!

As I regain my senses, I am instantly overwhelmed by embarrassment, grief, and despair.

“Waaaaaaaaah!”

I’m so embarrassed, sad, and in pain that I begin to bawl my eyes out.

“Seiyaaaaaaaaa!”

Tears and snot dribble about as I try to hug the Hero for emotional support,

but Seiya places a hand around my forehead and stops me.

“Quit it. That’s disgusting. Get away from me. Disgusting.”

He calls me disgusting twice, causing me to wail and cry even more.

“Noooooooo! Seiyaaaaaaa, don’t hate meeeeeeeeeee!”

“Then stop crying. You’re being worse than Rosalie right now.”

Not wanting to be worse than the barking dog princess, I try to force myself to stop crying, but the tears just won’t stop running down my cheeks. I am unable to hold back the feelings that pour out with the tears.

“But...! But...! This is your fault, Seiya! You’re the one who had sex with Valkyrie!”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Then why were you embracing each other while naked in bed?!”

“I told you, I was training.”

Seiya looks like he’s being serious, but it sounds like nothing more than a pathetic excuse to me.

“Rista, for argument’s sake, let’s imagine that your outlandish hypothesis is true. Why are you crying so much?”

I—I don’t know! Why am I this sad? Why am I this frustrated? It doesn’t matter how much I like him because he’s a human and I’m a goddess. But... But...

For some reason I feel like I’ve been cheated on!

I persist.

“You two really didn’t do it? You promise?”

Seiya lets out a deep sigh.

“How many times do I have to say it?”

“Really? Do you really promise? Swear to God?”

“You’re God, you idiot.”

After a few moments of silence...

“All right. It’s hard to believe, but...I believe you.”

I then start to wipe my tears away with the sleeve of my dress. Seiya scratches his head in a fed-up manner, then takes the Ristarte Hair Doll out of my hands.

“Put it in your item bag.”

He passes it to Mash.

“Ack?! Ah, ah, ah...!”

Mash juggles it back and forth between hands as if he were holding something hot.

“E-Elulu! Here, you take it!”

“E-ew! No way! Seiya told you to take it! There is no way I’m touching that thing!”

Watching their exchange almost makes me want to cry again, but Seiya sternly tells Mash: “Mash, you hold on to it.”

“Er...! F-fine...!”

And just like that, Mash reluctantly tucks the doll away in the item bag.

“So...are you two finished with training as well?”

“Y-yeah! You, too, Master Seiya?”

“Yeah.”

After firmly nodding, Seiya looks over at Valkyrie.

“Thanks for the training, Valkyrie.”

“Seiya...stop by again sometime, okay?”

“I will.”

They give each other meaningful stares after that.

“S-Seiya, come on! Let’s go! The last general is getting ready to attack the capital!”

I strongly push Seiya's back because I want to get out of here as soon as possible.

"Great Goddess Ishtar gave us permission to teleport ourselves directly to the imperial capital! We have to hurry! The survival of Gaeabrande is being threatened as we speak!"

After finally forcing him out of the room, I immediately create a gate to Gaeabrande. Seiya reluctantly and restlessly looks around for a while, but he brushes his shiny black hair back before the gate with his fingers as if he has made up his mind.

"All right... Let's go."

Seiya opens the door and crosses through the gate. While I gaze at his large back, I get the tiny sense that something is off. However, I got so worked up over what happened with Valkyrie that I don't even let it get to me. I simply think to myself, *Oh, I guess he just forgot.*

...Because, for the first time, Seiya doesn't say he is "perfectly prepared" after training.

The Last General

Desperate to get Seiya away from Valkyrie, I rush him to leave for Gaeabrande by mentioning crazy things like “The survival of this world is being threatened!” I’m feeling guilty about exaggerating until I suddenly hear a loud voice declare: “The survival of Roseguard is being threatened as we speak!”

When we appear near the imperial capital’s gate, I see a soldier wearing armor with the Roseguard imperial crest on it—multiple soldiers, countless soldiers...! What’s going on?! There are way too many soldiers here!

There are easily over a thousand soldiers in a single line, holding weapons while their faces are racked with fear. I follow their gazes to find something even more startling. A mouth split all the way to its ears, black wings on its back—a bizarre creature reminiscent of Chaos Machina’s Greater Demon form—stands a few meters up ahead with a line of soldiers as well. The army facing the thousands of imperial soldiers is a swarm of demons of equal size.

“I-it’s like a war zone!”

The ghastly situation immediately erases my sorrow. Mash draws his sword and prepares for battle while Elulu hides behind me. While paying careful attention to the demon hordes, we are suddenly surrounded by the imperial army.

“Who are you? Where did you even come from?”

“They’re suspicious!”

“You think they’re demons?”

“N-no, we’re—”

The moment I try to clear the air...

“They are no enemy of ours! That is the goddess and the Hero!”

I turn around in the direction of the well-projected voice to find an elderly soldier with a beard. Noticing me looking, his stern expression relaxes, and he lowers his head to me.

“It is an honor to see you again! Thanks again for your help back in Seimul!”

Uh... Who’s this guy again? Oh, wait! This is the soldier that we met when we ran into the undead monster at the church in Seimul!

Seiya curtly asks:

“What’s the situation?”

“General Eraser Kaiser’s elite unit, Demon’s Sword, has come to attack the imperial capital! We had the numbers advantage, but our army is no match for their devastating power! We were pushed back until we crossed Urugus Highway and had to continue to retreat until we found ourselves before the capital, Orphée!”

“Th-that means you have nowhere left to run!”

The soldier nods with an expression stricken with anguish.

“However...they have ceased their attack ever since we got here, and we have no idea what they are plotting...”

Just like he said, the demons are doing little more than watching us. It’s as if they’re waiting for something.

After some time passes, the enemy side finally makes a move. A demon remarkably larger than the rest suddenly appears, breaking through their line. Curved horns sprout from his head like a goat and armor-like black, glimmering muscles cover his body. But what startles me the most are his arms. He has three arms on each side, each holding a battle-ax or sword. Seiya sharpens his eyes.

“His aura is nothing like that of the other demons. That must be the final general.”

“So that’s Eraser Kaiser...!”

The six-armed demon leaps out before his troops, then speaks the language of the humans in a deep voice.

“Humans! Bring me your strongest warrior!”

“Hmph.” Seiya grunts. “Looks like he’s trying to put on a show of strength. He’s probably planning on killing the strongest warrior in the imperial army to lower their morale before attacking the capital.”

O-oh, I get it! So I’m guessing that means he’s really strong...

I use Scan on Eraser Kaiser.

ERASER KAISER

LV: 88

HP: 245,842 MP: 98,564

ATK: 218,333 DEF: 207,465 SPD: 140,251 MAG: 87,654

Resistance: Fire, Wind, Water, Lightning, Ice, Earth, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Instant Death

Special Abilities: Full MAG ↔ ATK Conversion (LV: MAX), Flight (LV: MAX), Evil Eye (LV: 15)

Skills: Mode: Evil Six

Personality: Savage

Ack! It’s just like Killapul said! His attack and defense really do exceed two hundred thousand! His other attributes are high as well... His stats are really balanced! Other than Thanatos, he might be the strongest enemy we’ve faced so far stat-wise!

With his bloodred demon eyes, Eraser glares at the imperial army.

“What’s wrong?! Why will no one step forward?! Is the imperial army nothing more than a bunch of cowards?!”

Before I even realize it, there are crowds of ally soldiers surrounding Seiya.

“Hero! Please help us!”

“Please defeat him!”

One after another, soldiers start begging Seiya for help after figuring out he’s the Hero.

We just got here a few seconds ago, and we already have to fight the last general?! Is Seiya going to be okay?! Is he ready?!

As always, Seiya doesn’t even blink. He draws his sword from its sheath, and the soldiers softly let out a cheer. Seiya starts to take a step forward...but he immediately pauses. Up ahead, there is already a soldier heading straight for Eraser Kaiser. Despite him being far away, I can see him clearly with my goddess vision. With white hair and wearing golden armor just like Rosalie, the soldier fearlessly pushes his way toward Eraser.

Someone near us murmurs:

“Is that...the emperor...?”

Before long, the voices of over one thousand imperial soldiers join together.

“The emperor...! It’s the emperor!”

“He left the castle just to save us!”

Mash strains his eyes.

“Th-that’s the emperor...? That’s Roseguard’s...strongest warrior?”

This is the Warmaster, whose sword can apparently cut through the heavens and slice open the planet. He has white hair that has lost its sheen and a face carved with wrinkles. The emperor is much further into his twilight years than I ever imagined.

“H-he’s so old...”

Even Elulu seems to be surprised. I figured he’d be in his forties or fifties since he’s Rosalie’s father, but he looks like he’s over seventy at least...

The emperor approaches the demon until he is only a few meters away before stopping. Eraser scoffs: “Hey, what’s with the geezer?”

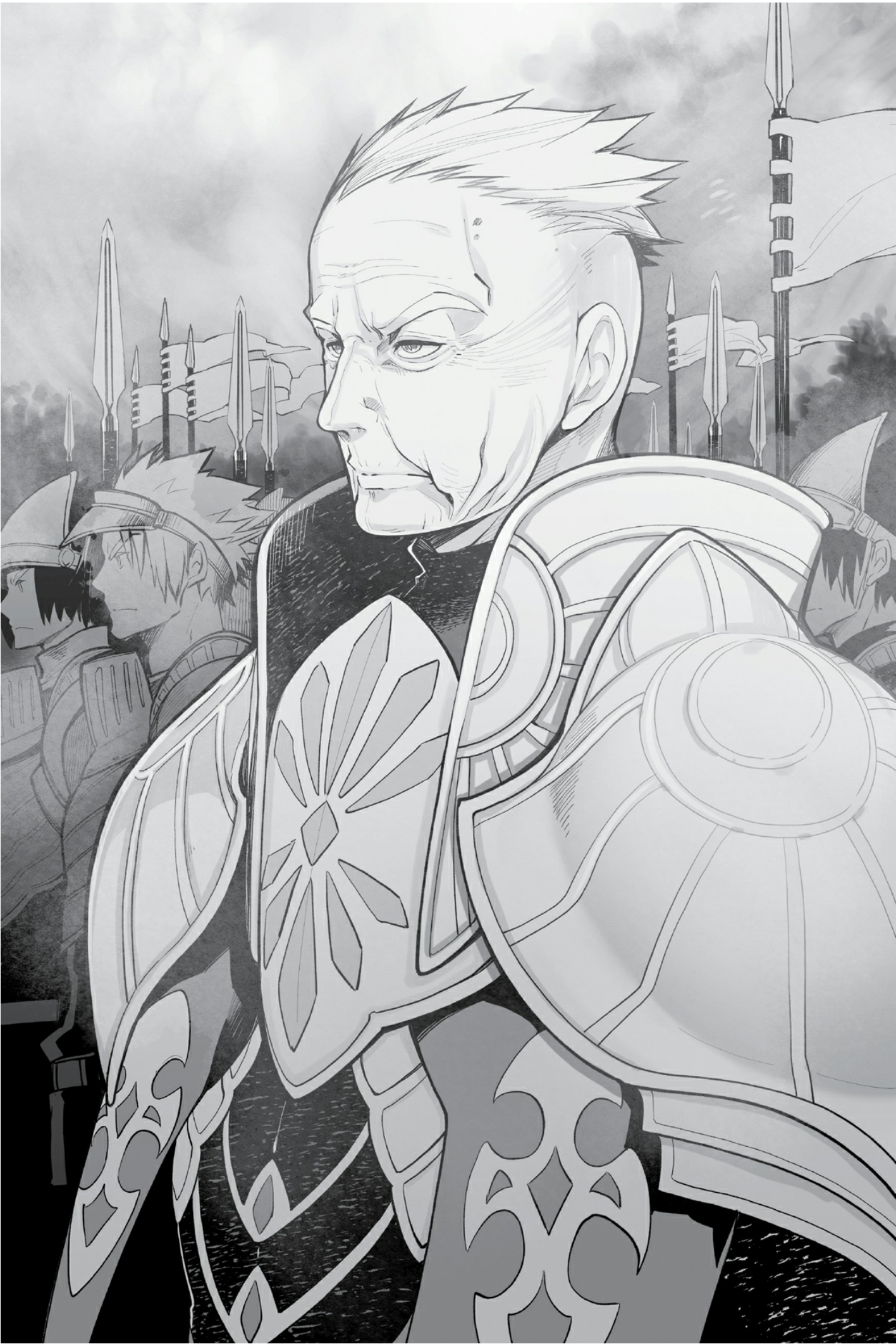
The other demons behind him roar with laughter as well.

“Gwa-ha-ha-ha! I don’t remember telling you humans to bring me a sacrifice!”

Listening to the demons’ laughter, I tug at Seiya’s arm.

“They’re calling him a sacrifice! Seiya, come on! We have to save him!”

But Seiya doesn’t even budge.



“Don’t let his appearance fool you. Look at that old man’s stats.”

“Huh?”

Seiya solemnly mutters:

“I can’t believe a human like this exists...”

I use Scan and take a glance at the emperor’s stats...

WARMASTER WOHLKS ROSEGUARD

LV: 90

HP: 259,985 MP: 0

ATK:	DEF: 176,358	SPD:	MAG:	GRW:
189,633		148,796	0	777

Resistance: Fire, Water, Lightning, Ice, Dark, Poison, Paralysis, Instant Death, Status Ailments

Special Abilities: Light’s Blessing (LV: MAX), Evolve Attack (LV: MAX)

Skills: Holy Strike, Holy Blast Sword, Holy Great Sword

Personality: Valiant

“I—I can’t believe what I’m seeing!”

The instant I finish checking the Warmaster’s attributes...

“Die, feeble old man!”

One of Eraser’s right arms—the one brandishing a claymore—swings down at the emperor’s head, but the Warmaster blocks it with his golden shield. The

heavy, dull sound of metal echoes.

“Oh...? I’m impressed. That was supposed to crush you and your shield along with it. It doesn’t look like you came all the way here just to die, after all. I’ve changed my mind about you, old man.”

Eraser continues with a sneer.

“Then let’s see how you like...Mode: Evil Six!”

A pitch-black aura emitting from his body, Eraser gets into an attack stance while pointing all six of his weapons at the Warmaster.

“Seiya! I know the emperor’s attributes are extraordinary for a human, but even then, his attack and defense are worse than Eraser’s! We have to help him!”

“All right.”

Even Seiya can no longer stand back and watch.

“There will be no need for that.”

I hear an indifferent voice from behind. Out of nowhere appears a slim man of an uncertain age, dressed in a white robe with golden embroidery.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Hero, Goddess. I am Flashika, the imperial mage of lightning.”

Even during a time like this, he elegantly drops to one knee and greets us.

“What do you mean we don’t have to help him?! I get that the emperor’s strong, but he’s up against one of the Demon Lord’s generals!”

“There is no need to worry.”

I know from personal experience just how frightening the four generals of Gaeabrande’s Demon Lord are. They possess powers that rival the Demon Lords of B-ranked to D-ranked worlds. And as we speak, Eraser is swinging all six of his weapons at the emperor. The Warmaster is managing to block the attacks with his massive shield, but it’s clear he’s struggling just to defend himself.

I—I can’t watch this! The difference in power is obvious! We have to do something, or he’ll be chopped into pieces!

However, that moment comes far too soon. The six-armed demon's relentless blows knock the emperor's shield into the air!

"Heh-heh-heh!"

The demon thrusts his longsword while he laughs. Unable to completely dodge the attack, the sword nicks the emperor's cheek, drawing blood. But the ferocious attacks do not stop. The emperor's arms, legs—every part of his body not protected by armor is faintly but steadily sliced open.

"I—I can't watch this any longer! He's going to get himself killed!"

But Flashika remains calm, quite my opposite.

"It's okay. This is how the emperor fights."

Flashika looks at Eraser like one would a fool.

"Only an egotistical dolt would try to invade the capital, Orphée, itself."

I watch in mute amazement. Can he not see the emperor's the one losing?! How can Flashika and the other soldiers watch the battle with such confidence?

Without a shield and only a sword, there is no longer any way for him to defend himself from Mode: Evil Six! All that's left is for him to be slowly sliced up to bits. However, that's when the Warmaster finally breaks his silence.

"Your swordsmanship is remarkable. I can see why you were made into a general. However..."

There is a deep note of enjoyment in his husky voice.

"I have seen all you have to offer."

Immediately, I hear the repeated metallic clang of one sword knocking away another.

"What...?"

Despite dominating most of the battle, Eraser's face clouds over. While holding his sword with only one hand, the Warmaster deflects each of the attacks so swiftly that not even Eraser can see his blade. Seeing a human single-handedly outperforming a demon attacking with six arms is a miraculous sight. Then...

“Holy Strike...!”

The emperor’s sword begins to glow before a light instantly shoots in Eraser’s direction.

Thump.

One of Eraser’s arms—the arm holding the battle-ax—falls to the ground as black blood gushes from the wound.

“Wh-what?!”

Thereupon, trails of light resembling geometric patterns illuminate the area. The next moment, each of the demon’s remaining arms drops to the ground!

“Th-this can’t be...! This is impossible! Y-you’re not even the Hero—”

“Sorry for not being the Hero.”

The emperor raises his radiating sword into the air.

“Crush Saint’s Light!”

Then he buries the blade in Eraser’s head! The sword continues slicing through the demon’s body until exiting through his crotch, splitting him in two! Without even slowing down, the blade proceeds to hit the ground, creating a crater with an explosion! The earthquake is so powerful that I lose balance and fall on my rear.

“N-no way...! H-he defeated the fourth general?!”

As I stare in blank amazement, the surrounding soldiers break into loud cheers. In the midst of the shouts of joy, I cling to Seiya’s leg and pull myself up.

“S-Seiya! How? How did the emperor defeat Eraser? I mean, wasn’t Eraser’s attack higher than his? Plus, he had six arms!”

“Use Scan on the Warmaster one more time.”

I gaze at the emperor once more as he sheathes his sword.

WARMASTER WOHLKS ROSEGUARD

ATK: 221,512

“What...?! His attack power increased?!”

“It appears his attributes grew in battle until they surpassed Eraser’s.”

“I-is that even possible?!”

I’m at a loss for words. The soldiers are still brimming with excitement, but the enemies start to make a move.

“Y-you’ll pay for what you did!”

“Lowly humans...!”

Losing control, the demons rush forth in droves as the Warmaster unsheathes his sword once more and raises it high into the air.

“Massive Saint’s Light!”

The illuminating sword extends in a flash as if it were cutting through the heavens. The emperor slowly turns the massive blade of light sideways, then gives it a mighty horizontal swing. The dozens of demons that lunge for the Warmaster are split in half at the waist.

“Eek...!”

The demons in the back panic, shrinking in fear until...

“Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

The Warmaster himself becomes the aggressor and attacks! Countless demons perish with every strike. Furthermore, after seeing their emperor take the offensive, the imperial army soldiers raise their swords into the air in unison and charge toward the demons as well. After that, Flashika holds out his magic staff by my side and chants: “I call upon the divine power of Orand, God of Lightning...and bring judgment upon your evil souls!”

The instant he finishes chanting, a bolt of lightning shoots down from the heavens before branching off and targeting numerous enemies. Charred bodies litter the battleground.

“R-retreat! Retreaaaaaat!”

Their scheme had the complete opposite effect. Instead of killing our general, they lost theirs, resulting in the total breakdown of Demon's Sword. As the enemies retreat, the emperor turns on his heel and slowly approaches us. He relaxes his majestic expression, sending us a smile.

"Oh, dear me. It appears this old man accidentally robbed you of your duty, Hero."

Even without introductions, the emperor already knew that I was a goddess and Seiya was the Hero. I lower my head to the Warmaster.

"Please don't worry about it! In fact, we're extremely grateful you defeated such a powerful enemy for us!"

Mash and Elulu are bouncing with excitement.

"You were freaking amazing!"

"I can't believe you defeated the last general so easily!"

The Warmaster smiles even more.

"I've gotten old. In the past, it would have never taken me that much time to defeat my opponent."

What?! He was even stronger when he was younger?! What kind of human is he?!

As I am unable to control my astonishment, the Warmaster reverently lowers his head to me.

"Goddess, it is an honor to meet you."

"Huh...?! Oh...! Th-thanks..."

His gentlemanly behavior makes me blush slightly. *Ack! Th-there's no reason for me to act all shy!* This is how people normally act before goddesses! Seiya's been treating me like garbage for so long that I almost forgot!

"Please come to our castle later if you can. There is something I wish to show you, Goddess."

"Something you want to show me? Like what?"

"That is just something you will have to come and see for yourself."

The emperor invites me to the castle with a gentle expression... Of course, I don't mind going with him, but there's something really bothering me about all this.

"H-hey, uh... By the way, why aren't you going after the Demon Lord and his men yourself? I mean, you're extremely strong..."

Thereupon, a faint hint of agony clouds the Warmaster's expression.

"I..."

"You...?"

Just as I urge him to continue...

"Gwah...!"

The emperor clutches his chest and crouches down. Noticing something unusual, Flashika rushes over.

"Th-this isn't good! The emperor's...! G-get everyone out of here! Now! Hurry!"

"Gwaaaaaaaaah!"

The Warmaster groans as Flashika yells.

I-is this some kind of incurable disease?! Is that why the emperor can't leave the capital?!

"The emperor... The emperor's..."

Mage Flashika's composure has transformed into dismay. In a booming voice, he yells out: "The emperor is going to turn into an infant!"

...I'm sorry, what?

Psss...sss...ssssssh...

I hear something utterly bizarre and turn around to find liquid endlessly trickling down his leg. His once majestic expression is no longer to be found. Tears well up in his beady eyes while he sucks on his thumb like a child and confesses: "Mm... I went potty..."

The Imperial Capital, Orphée

“Someone...! Anyone...! Bring me a towel!”

After soldiers bring Flashika a towel they had prepared...

“Forgive me, Emperor!”

He presses the towel against the Warmaster’s crotch.

“Mn... I hate being wet... Hey, can I take my undies off yet?”

“N-no, you mustn’t! Please bear with it just a little longer!”

“Awww...”

The Warmaster’s nose runs as he appears to be on the verge of tears. One thing after another has been so astounding since the Demon’s Sword attacked that Elulu, Mash, and I are frozen in a state of shock. Only Seiya watches the emperor with his usual indifference.

“Rista, use Scan and check out the Warmaster’s special abilities.”

“I—I just did a few minutes ago, though.”

“Do it again.”

I focus solely on the emperor’s special abilities and use Scan.

WARMMASTER WOHLKS ROSEGUARD

Special Abilities: Childishness (LV: MAX), Spoiled Brat (LV: 8) Crybaby (LV: 9)

“...?! What the hell are these abilities?! And his Childishness is max level?!”

“Looks like we know why the emperor can’t leave the capital now.”

Despite being on the verge of tears after wetting his pants a few moments ago, the emperor already seems to have forgotten about it.

“Buttafwy! Buttafwy!”

He runs around with both hands in the air. Incidentally, there aren’t any butterflies around.

I—I don’t know if I’d say he was acting childish... It’s more like...!

Just then, I hear a horse galloping over from behind. When I turn around, I see a familiar female knight with azure hair on a white horse coming this way.

“Father!”

“Wosalie!”

Squealing with joy, he throws his arms around his daughter.

“I was so lonely! I missed you sooo much, Wosalie!”

“F-Father, please calm down!”

It looks more like a mother finding her lost child than a father and daughter embracing. Not only us but the nearby soldiers are speechless as well. After noticing our stares, Rosalie explodes with rage like a volcano.

“What are you looking at?!”

The soldiers wince.

“We have work to do! Go! Rescue those who were injured while pursuing the Demon’s Sword remnants!”

The soldiers scatter like baby spiders, leaving only us.

“Y-you were here, too?! Tch!”

Surely, Rosalie never wanted us to see this. She wears an indescribable, complicated expression, but the emperor suddenly hugs her again.

“I love you, Wosalie! Sooo much!”

“Father! Please stop! If you don’t behave yourself, monsters are going to come and get you!”

“Monsters?! But I’m ascares of monsters!”

“Then you have to be quiet! Okay?”

“Okay... I’ll be quiet... Mn...”

Noticing Seiya staring at the emperor with an ice-cold gaze, Rosalie turns completely red and screams: “What are you looking at! If you’ve got something to say, then say it!”

But seemingly not interested, Seiya doesn’t even say a word, so I decide to speak up for him.

“H-hey, Rosalie? This turning-into-an-infant thing is—”

Thereupon, she immediately grabs my lapel and glares at me like a demon.

“Stop! Don’t say another word!”

“But you just told us to talk if we had something to say!”

The emperor suddenly runs over to Seiya while we’re busy with our exchange.

“Hey, mister! Let’s play! Come on!”

Seiya casts a cruel, frigid eye on the Warmaster.

“Go away.”

“...Huh?”

The emperor appears puzzled for a moment before...

“Waaaaaah!”

He starts openly bawling his eyes out in front of everyone.

“Hey!! You don’t have to be so rude, you ass!”

After Rosalie rushes over to her father, he jumps into her arms.

“*Sniffle...* I was so...scared... I peed myself again... *Sniffle...*”

“Aw, it’s okay. I’ll make sure he gets what’s coming to him!”

I lightly pat Rosalie on the shoulder while she’s consoling her father.

“H-hey, um... I just remembered, but the emperor told us to come to the castle. He said he wanted to show us something...”

“Ah! That can wait until later!”

“Later? How much later?”

Out of nowhere, the Warmaster starts chasing after another butterfly.

“Buttafwy! Buttafwy!”

“Hey, do something about this geezer.”

“Wh-who are you calling a geezer! Hold your tongue!”

“Hey, Rosalie? How much later do we have to wait?”

“Shut up! Ugh! Just give me an hour—no, two hours! Come back to the castle in two hours! Go hang out in the city or something until then!”

Seiya then turns on his heel.

“Don’t mind if I do. Sounds like a far better use of my time than watching this geezer all day.”

“You asshole! Just go! Goooooooo!”

“C-come on! Let’s go check out the city!”

Elulu rushes us to the imperial capital, and we run away from Rosalie before she blows up on us.

This might be stating the obvious, but Orphée is the most flourishing city we’ve been to yet. Wearing fashionable clothing, men and women of all ages crowd the main cobbled path. Lively voices echo from the crammed row of shops lined up on the street. It looks like the town is in the mood to celebrate. After all, the emperor defeated the last general before regressing into an infant, so nobody has a clue that even happened. They simply praise the emperor for his great achievements. But I don’t blame them. Thanks to the emperor, the only enemy left for us to defeat is the Demon Lord.

B-but...I don’t know. It doesn’t feel real. I mean, the last general was killed by someone from this world. I suppose we could consider ourselves lucky depending on how you look at it, though...right?

After walking for a while, a sign with the word BAR written on it comes into view. I tap Seiya on the shoulder.

“Hey, Seiya! You think we can check out this bar? It looks wonderful!”

But Seiya gives me an uninterested glare.

“What are you going to do if the enemies attack while you’re intoxicated?”

“I—I just want to enjoy the atmosphere!”

“Bars are full of drunks. They always try to start fights even if you didn’t do anything, and it always ends up with someone getting stabbed to death. So no thanks.”

...Sigh. He’s even overly cautious when it comes to things like this.

In the middle of my mildly depressive episode, Mash suddenly takes my hand.

“Yo, Rista! Look! There’s a casino over there!”

When I look up ahead, I see a girl dressed in a bunny suit holding a sign while trying to usher in customers. Since Gaeabrande still hasn’t made that much scientific progress, there aren’t any light-up billboards or gaudy illuminations. But even then, the building is colorfully painted and decorated, giving off that unique, flamboyant aura that casinos usually have.

Elulu’s eyes sparkle.

“So this is a casino! This is the first time I’ve ever seen one!”

One of the pleasures of being an adventurer in fantasy worlds is the casinos! Mash and Elulu seem interested as well, so...

I give them a smile.

“Want to go inside for a bit?”

“Rista?! Are you sure?!”

“You know what they say about all work and no play. Here—I’ll give you some money, so go exchange it for some casino chips.”

However, Seiya leaves us in front of the casino and briskly walks away.

“S-Seiya...?! Wait! You’re not going to go inside?!”

He looks back in an annoyed manner and flat out states: “If there is even a one percent chance of losing, then I’m not gambling.”

Just how serious of a person do you have to be?!

Mash and Elulu really want to go inside, so I persistently try to convince Seiya.

“You might be able to get a really good sword or some armor if you exchange enough chips.”

Ha! Take that! That should get Seiya’s attention.

...Or so I thought. Seiya hits me with a piercing, ice-cold glare.

“Rista, do you seriously believe the casino would be giving out weapons that would work against the Demon Lord? Your brain must be about the size of that white ball that rolls around the roulette table.”

“...?! It’s not that small!”

While Seiya continues to walk away, Elulu drops her shoulders in a disheartened manner and mutters: “Aww... I really wanted to go inside...”

As if I were slightly reprimanding Seiya, I argue:

“Seiya, a little fun isn’t going to hurt anyone. Besides, Elulu and Mash really want to go inside. So come on. Please?”

“I’d rather use what little free time we have to go to the weapon and armor shop. The imperial capital might sell something rare that could prove to be useful in battle.”

“We can do that later! So come on, let’s—”

Thereupon, Seiya gives me a frigid glare even cooler than the first.

“I thought you were a goddess. Shouldn’t you be thinking about this world a little, too?”

“I am thinking about it. That’s why I think we need to take a break from time to time!”

“Hmph. And you wonder why Valkyrie called you a third-rate goddess.”

...Excuse me? Wh-why did you have to bring her up right now?

“Well, excuse me! Sorry for not being as strong as Valkyrie!”

“R-Ristie! Let’s calm down!”

Elulu tries to talk me down, but Seiya keeps walking away, showing no

concern at all until he stops before an item shop.

“Hello, sir! I’ve got just the item for you! Special Medicine! On sale for a limited time only!”

“Oh? And what makes it different from normal medicine or herbs?”

“Its healing properties are on another level! One of these will heal any wound in no time!”

“Really? If you’re lying, I’m burning down the shop. Got it?”

“Sure... Wait, what?! No! You sure say some frightening things, stranger! But I’m telling the truth! One of these special herbs is equivalent to three normal ones!”

“All right. I’ll take a few.”

As always, despite saying “a few,” he orders an absurd amount. Irritated, I yell: “Seiya! I have healing magic, you know! You don’t need that junk!”

But the shopkeeper’s expression clouds over before Seiya even answers.

“What do you mean ‘that junk’? Don’t underestimate the quality of my herbs! They’re every bit as good as a high priest’s healing spell!”

I’d usually apologize, but he just pushed all the wrong buttons.

“What are you trying to say?! Because my magic is way more powerful than those!”

“Then let’s just see for ourselves! Oh, what luck! ...Hey, you!”

The shopkeeper coincidentally finds a soldier walking down the street, an agonized look on his face.

“D-do you need something from me? Both my arms were injured during the fight against Demon’s Sword, but I don’t have any money to heal myself...”

The shopkeeper observes the soldier’s arms, then grins.

“Both your arms have similar injuries. What do you say? Want to see who can heal this soldier’s arm the quickest? I’ll give you a fifty percent discount on all my merchandise if you win!”

“Bring it on!”

He begins to rub the Special Medicine on the soldier’s right arm, so I immediately start focusing everything I’ve got on his left arm.

*Will of creation that spreads across this vast universe, lend me your strength!
Haaaaaah! Grow, my goddess power! Groooooooooow!*

...One minute later.

“These high-level herbs are amazing! My right arm feels as good as new! ...My left arm still stings a little, though.”

...I lost. I tried my best but was unable to defeat the Special Medicine. Seiya looks down at me as I hang my head in shame.

“...Useless.”

“‘Useless’?! You’re gonna need a healing herb when I get done with you! You know, I wouldn’t have lost to that herb if I unlocked my true goddess powers!”

“Then do it.”

“They’ll fire me if I do that!”

“Which is why you’ll never be anything more than a low-level, off-brand herb.”

“I-I’ve told you already! Goddesses can’t help out humans too much or—”

“Hey, give me some more Special Medicine. They’re limited items, right? Give me as many as you can.”

“Coming right up, sir! Thank you very much!”

After leaving the item shop...

“Ugh! Stupid jerk! What’s his problem!”

I continue muttering to myself, unable to control my anger, but Mash soon calls out to me.

“Hey, Rista? Don’t let it get to you. At least, you’ve got Ristarte hair on your side!”

“Shut the hell up, *Mushroom*! One more word outta you and I’ll rip your little

mushroom right off!”

“What the hell?! Aren’t you supposed to be a goddess?!”

“I-it’s your fault for saying that, Mash! Right, Ristie?”

I even ignore Elulu and storm off.

“Ristie...?”

Seiya looks around the weapon shop for a while. After leaving, he gazes at the castle in the distance and muses: “All right, that should do it.”

He starts his journey to the castle, but with all my pent-up frustration...I don’t think I’ve ever felt worse.

The Reason for Eternal Life

The giant castle proudly pierces the sky as if to convey the prosperity of the nation and the majesty of its emperor. A guard opens the sturdy, robust gate for us as we approach.

“You’re here.”

Clad in an azure dress, Rosalie waves us over the moment we walk inside. We follow her down a red carpet until we reach a door. Within the room is a long, large table with chairs lined up around it. However, the emperor is nowhere to be found.

“There is something I need to tell you. However, before that...”

Rosalie gives Seiya a quizzical look.

“That’s the same platinum mail you were wearing before. Where’s the legendary armor?”

“A giant turtle ate it.”

“Tch. This is no time for jokes.”

“I’m not joking. I’d be wearing it if we got it. The Demon Lord’s army destroyed the armor before we got there.”

“What?!”

Rosalie is speechless for a few moments, then she shakes her head.

“Enough about the armor. What did you want to tell us?”

“O-oh, right... Have a seat.”

After offering us a seat, Rosalie sits down on the opposite side of the table to face us and slowly begins stringing her words together.

“Thirty years ago, Emperor Wohlks Roseguard suppressed the Cyclops Revolt

all by himself, and fifty years ago, he conquered the evil nation of Haades ruled by the Snake King Dorflare. Even this year, despite being in his eighties, he headed to the frigid continent of Alphoreiz in the north alone to defeat the Demon Lord. However...he apparently reverted to an infant before crossing over into the region. Our army found him crying and brought him back, but..."

"Get to the point."

Wearing a pained expression, Rosalie reveals:

"My father...isn't long for this world. The castle doctors believe that this eccentric behavior of his is due to old age."

Thereupon, Rosalie's normally grim countenance relaxes and transforms into the face of a loving daughter.

"My father was not only strong but kind as well. He would always rub my head with those big hands whenever he came back from battle. The Warmaster is my—is the pride of the entire nation. That's why, at the very least, I want him to live the rest of his life in peace."

Rosalie looks at Seiya pleadingly for a change.

"If my father asks to go with you to fight the Demon Lord, please persuade him not to join you."

Seiya bluntly replies:

"That goes without saying. A geezer like that would be more trouble than he's worth."

Rosalie quietly nods.

"Thank you. Oh, and one more thing... Stop calling him a geezer!"

When Rosalie takes us to the throne room, we find the emperor sitting on the throne with a majestic air. As we approach him, he bashfully looks our way.

"I don't remember much about what happened after I killed the general, but... it appears I caused a lot of trouble for you all. I am sure Rosalie has told you, but...I sometimes black out and lose recollection of my actions."

"What about now?"

The Warmaster frowns.

“I’m sure you can tell for yourself, but I’m fine. I just blacked out earlier, so it won’t happen again for a while. M-more importantly, Hero, now that the last general has perished, I assume you plan on attacking the Demon Lord’s base?”

“Yeah. But I don’t need your help.”

“Er...”

Seiya cuts the emperor off before he can even say anything, causing him to briefly fall silent. But before long, he jovially guffaws.

“Ha-ha-ha... Ha-ha-ha-ha! But of course! You all should be able to save the world without this senile old man tagging along!”

Rosalie suddenly chimes in to back the emperor up.

“Father! You defeated the last general all by yourself! You have done more than enough to help, so let’s just leave the rest to the Hero!”

“You’re right! You are absolutely right! Besides, the actual reason I invited everyone to the castle is because I needed to speak with the goddess!”

The emperor projects his voice as if trying to persuade himself. He then flashes a warm smile in my direction.

“Goddess, I wanted to show you our very fine cathedral!”

“What a wonderful idea, Father! I am sure she would love to see such a sacred place!”

But just then, the doors to the throne room burst open, and a soldier comes rushing in with a look of desperation. Rosalie yells:

“Soldier! What is the meaning of this?!”

“I-I’m sorry, but I have a message! The remnants of Demon’s Sword have attacked the nearby village!”

“What?!”

The Warmaster jumps off his throne as if his sense of justice stirred his blood.

“I must hurry!”

Rosalie, on the other hand, stares hard at Seiya as if pleading. Apparently noticing, Seiya lets out a brief sigh.

“Hmph. Allow me to take care of this. You’re the king. Stay here and protect the capital.”

“B-but...”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll take care of it in no time. How about you show this goddess here that cathedral of yours while I’m gone?”

I look at Seiya in astonishment, for I was just getting ready to go with him. But I no longer have the energy to make jokes or get angry at him.

Seiya turns his gaze to Mash and Elulu.

“You two are coming with me. I need help carrying things.”

“Su-sure...”

“O-okay...”

Although concerned about me, they leave the throne room with Seiya. Even Rosalie glances back at me on her way out. Only Seiya leaves without even acknowledging my existence.

The cathedral stands on the vast grounds of the imperial castle. The majestic and detailed architecture of the door in the front rivals the castle itself. Before coming here, the Warmaster changed into gold armor as a way to pay respect at such a sacred site. He slowly opens the entrance.

As the heavy door closes behind us, I survey the inside of the cathedral, which is more spacious than I could have ever imagined. Against a backdrop of beautiful stained glass windows rests a stone statue of a goddess with wings. Light colored all the shades of the rainbow flows inside. There are no chairs on the marbled floor for visitors to use for prayer—just a vast, open space. The two of us walk briskly alone.

“Legend has it that a few decades ago...a goddess appeared before the one who would save the world. I built this cathedral in longing for that moment. I was never granted such a role, though.”

The emperor stops before the goddess statue, then gives me a smile with a

sorrowful hue.

“However, I never expected I would be given the honor of inviting the real goddess here during my lifetime. I am truly moved.”

I am feeling like crap thanks to Seiya, but I can't keep sulking when someone's pouring his heart out to me like this. I break my silence with a cheerful note.

“This really is a wonderful cathedral! Not only is it beautiful, but it's really well-made. Its elegance is unlike anything I've ever seen!”

After just saying what's on my mind, the emperor's lips curl upward.

“I am so happy you noticed. We made sure this cathedral was sturdily built so it could also be used as a temporary shelter if demons were to ever attack.”

“Oh, wow! You were really thinking about the people when you built it! That coldhearted Hero could really learn a thing or two from you!”

“Goddess, after watching you two together...I have to ask. Are things not going well between you and the Hero?”

I can no longer hold in my pent-up frustration.

“You wouldn't even be able to imagine! Seiya completely takes me for granted! I mean, it's been like this ever since we first met! He always puts me down by saying things like, *You're useless* or *I don't need you*. And to top it off, he ends up doing such lewd things with other goddesses. Ugh... Just thinking about it pisses me off!”

The emperor remains mature and smiles in stark contrast to my rage.

“Ha-ha-ha! The more talented you are, the more twisted your personality is, after all.”

But the old man in front of me has a wonderful personality despite being talented. Perhaps this is the wisdom of age, but...*sigh*. I really wish I had a Hero like him instead!

“Either way, you are a divine being who will live on for eternity. Therefore, these frustrating times are nothing more than a blip for you. You shouldn't concern yourself so much with what humans shackled by mortality have to say.”

“Y-yeah...I guess you have a point.”

The Warmaster gazes up at the goddess statue before muttering:

“By the way, Goddess, do you know the reason gods live for eternity?”

“N-no...? Why?”

“When you live as long as I have, you hear many legends and whatnot. And well, while I do not know whether it’s true, let me tell you a story. Just think of it as a fairy tale.”

With that, the emperor begins to tell me a tale in a husky voice that projects throughout the cathedral.

“You descended on this world, Gaeabrande, in human form. In addition, the soul you currently bear is a tentative spirit known as the astral soul. Your real soul—your divine soul—is in the spirit world, being kept in a place where time has stopped. Therefore, even if you died in this world, you would only lose your temporary fragment—the astral soul. As long as your divine soul is in the Chamber of Eternal Stasis, you will live on forever. That is why.”

Wh-what?! I had no idea! Seriously?!

“It is the same principle for the Hero as well, which is why he will simply return to his own world even if he dies in this one. The Hero’s true soul is still in his world. Therefore, he would simply return to it upon death.”

“O-oh, wow! That makes sense!”

“But, well, as I mentioned earlier, this tale could be nothing more than a rumor.”

“I think it’s real.”

“Oh, do you?”

The emperor smiles. However, Aria once told me about a room where time is frozen in the unified spirit world and that the Great Goddess Ishtar managed said room. I always wondered what Ishtar was doing there at the time, but it all makes sense after hearing the emperor’s story.

“Anyway, I’m surprised you know so much!”

“Ha-ha-ha! I’m glad you enjoyed it. Then let me tell you one more tale of a certain magic item.”

“A magic item...?”

“Yes. Somewhere in the universe exists a terrifying magic item known as Chain Destruction. If used to destroy an astral soul, then the divine soul will be destroyed as well due to a chain reaction.”

“S-so you mean that...both Seiya and I could die if someone has that?!”

“Precisely. And there are rumors that the Demon Lord of Gaeabrande may already possess this item...”

The emperor looks at me as if he were telling me a late-night ghost story, sending a chill down my spine.

“Qu-quit it! You’re scaring me!”

“Ha-ha-ha. My apologies. However, there are also rumors that the reason the Demon Lord doesn’t leave his castle and waits for the Hero and goddess to show up...is because he has already used Chain Destruction, making resurrection impossible...”

“B-but that’s just a rumor, right?! First of all, Chain Destruction probably doesn’t even exist! There’s no way it’s real!”

I raise my voice, trying to rid my heart of the fast-spreading fear.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that...”

The emperor slowly walks behind the goddess statue before returning with a sheath in hand.

“The Demon Lord has already tortured thousands of clergymen, ruthlessly stealing their life force in order to produce a negative aura, which he used to create Chain Destruction. Then after using it, he stretched its powers around his fortress. Furthermore, the Demon Lord’s magic isn’t restricted to just that. He can even produce weapons that possess the terrifying magic of Chain Destruction...”

Before I even realize it, the emperor’s good-natured expression is gone. The Warmaster Wohlks Roseguard unsheathes a coal-black bladed sword, then

points it at me.

“A weapon that induces Chain Destruction, that can destroy the Hero’s soul and even kill the goddess—this is the God Eater.”

Consider All Possibilities

The emperor stares at me with eyes more piercing than the tip of his sword, and I instinctively retreat.

“I am terribly sorry, Goddess, but I need you to die. I will pierce your vital organs with this blade.”

“Y-you’re kidding, right?!”

“I hear that, as long as you’re alive, the Hero can escape to the spirit world whenever he wishes. That is why I must kill you first and cut off his path of retreat. This is a standard practice used in battle.”

So he’s going after Seiya?! But why?!

The emperor raises his wrinkled hand out before me.

“Old age is cruel. My steel-like body, my clear mind—all of it has become like this. I didn’t go to the Demon Lord’s stronghold, Alphoreiz, because I have a chivalrous heart. I went there to grant this old body of mine a heroic end...and that is how I encountered the Demon Lord.”

Rosalie told us he never made it to Alphoreiz! Yet he’s telling me that he already crossed paths with the Demon Lord?!

“He saw through it all. He even knew the wish I had buried deep within my heart. Then he bestowed the God Eater upon me. Now...let us put an end to this idle talk. I must be quick before I black out again.”

The emperor holds the black sword back in a rear stance.

“I once truly did worship and respect the gods. Therefore, as an act of compassion, I will kill you with a single strike.”

“Stop!! Waaaaaait!”

I scream at the top of my lungs, casting away my goddess-like behavior, but

the Warmaster thrusts his large sword without hesitating even a moment.

“Gwaheeeeek?!”

The emperor shows slight surprise as I twist my body, somehow managing to dodge the attack.

“I am impressed you dodged that. You have better eyes than I thought. Even I would have trouble ending the life of a target that keeps moving.”

“Ah?!”

A dull pain suddenly shoots through my legs as my body simultaneously begins flying backward and falling to the ground.

“...That’s why I have no choice but to do this.”

After sweeping me onto the floor, the emperor sits astride me, then points the God Eater right at my heart.

Wait, wait, wait! What’s going on?! Am I really going to die?! Is my soul really going to disappear, too?! B-but...!

“N-no... I don’t...”

After a faint, trembling voice rushes out of my mouth, the emperor looks at me in disgust.

“Are you afraid to die? You poor thing. While you may be a goddess, it seems you are really no different from a young girl.”

He lifts the sword higher into the air.

“But I will still show no mercy!”

I’m so scared and in so much pain that the tears just flow down my cheeks. I thought I was immortal, but I’m going to be killed. I’ve never felt fear like this before...and yet, this sense of despair seems familiar. I feel like I know what it means to be helpless, having my life robbed from me.

“Seiya... Help...”

I unconsciously mutter his name. Then the emperor shakes his head.

“Reality isn’t a fairy tale. In the real world, Heroes do not show up and save

those in danger in the nick of time. The Hero will not come for you. Nobody expects that I would attack the goddess, and nobody believes that a goddess could even die in the first place. The Hero knows that most of all. That is why he is probably off hunting the remaining Demon's Sword soldiers without a care in the world."

He's right. Seiya would never show up so conveniently to save me. But it isn't about what's logical. Driven into a corner, my soul calls for the Hero to come save me.

"Help...! Seiyaaaaaaaaa...!"

"Your struggles are futile. Goddess, it is time for you to return to the source."

As the emperor brandishes the sword over his head, I promptly cover my chest with my arms. But I know this is a meaningless gesture. The sword will go through my arms, pierce my heart, and I'll die.

I know it's too late to regret anything now, but...at the very least...I wish I'd made up with Seiya before I died...

The actual moment of death is too frightening to witness, so I look away. Tears welling up in my eyes, I stare at the entrance to the cathedral. Then...it flies open with a *bang*! As the sun peaks through, an arrow of light soars through the air toward the emperor like a ray of sunshine.

"Hmm?!"

Before piercing my heart, the Warmaster lifts up his sword to a mid-stance and knocks away the three light arrows with the God Eater.

Th-that was Shining Arrow! Seiya?!

But the Hero is nowhere to be found. Instead, pale as a sheet, Rosalie stands at the entrance.

"Th-this can't be...! Surely, my father would never attack the goddess...!"

Elulu and Mash poke their heads out from her side.

"Ristie!! Are you okay?!"

"Master Seiya was right!"

They immediately rush over to my aid. Then I hear the violent sound of swords clashing beside me as I lie on the ground. When I look to my side, I see the Adamantitor and God Eater clash! Out of nowhere, Seiya now stands before me, crossing blades with the emperor.

“Get away from her, old man.”

The Warmaster is even more taken aback than I am.

“I see. You used the light arrows to dazzle me, then snuck in. At any rate, I can’t believe you actually showed up.”

“I told you to get away from her. Without Rista, I... I...”

I have never seen Seiya this serious before. The tears endlessly slide down my cheeks as my chest burns. With a straight face, Seiya says:

“I... I won’t be able to return home without her.”

...Yep. That’s...yep. I figured.

Seiya swings his leg with all his might.

“Gwahn?!”

And he kicks me high into the air like a soccer ball. When I hit the ground, I continue rolling all the way toward the others until Mash suddenly stomps on my face to stop me.

“Oof!”

“Oh, crap! S-sorry, Rista! You okay?!”

“I wouldn’t say I’m okay, but yeah... More importantly, what are you guys doing here?!”

“Seiya suddenly said, *‘I’m worried about Rista. If something happens to her, I won’t be able to return home’!* So we came back midway there!”

I glance at Seiya once more as he faces the emperor. They draw back their locked swords and create some distance between each other.

“Hero, let me ask you this one thing... Do you have powers of clairvoyance?”

“Unfortunately, no. All I can do is explore the possibilities. You attacking Rista

was one of those possibilities.”

“I don’t get it. What do you mean?”

“You want to know why? Then let me tell you.”

Seiya begins explaining in a clear voice.

“Maybe the general, Eraser, actually just pretended to be killed by the emperor but is still alive and will wait until I’m gone to attack the capital. Maybe Eraser is actually dead but turned into a ghost and will resurrect. Maybe Eraser won’t attack the capital, but the Demon Lord himself will. In addition...”

He endlessly continues listing things off as if he’s delirious.

“What...? What is he going on about?”

The Warmaster stares at Seiya in utter confusion. But Seiya’s misguided possibilities gradually move toward the truth.

“...It’s common knowledge that goddesses can’t die, but perhaps even then, the Demon Lord of this so-called S-ranked world used his irregular powers to create a weapon that could even kill a god. In addition, when the emperor went to the northern continent of Alphoreiz, perhaps he actually encountered the Demon Lord and received said weapon after the Demon Lord won him over... which means he could be after Rista. In other words...”

Seiya sets his unbelievably piercing eyes on the Warmaster.

“Maybe the Warmaster, Wohlks Roseguard, is my enemy.”

A jolt of electricity runs through my body.

“Maybe, maybe, perhaps”?! What’s with this guy?! He’s seriously sick in the head! Real sick! But it’s amazing! It’s truly wonderful! I don’t know why, but I can’t stop crying!

Seiya throws me a sharp glance for some reason while I explode with emotions.

“And perhaps...this goddess is a fake.”

“...! I’m the real thing! Can you stop with the speculating already?!”

After I yell at him, the emperor suddenly begins cackling.

“I am truly amazed. It’s not that you’re sharp and have good intuition. It’s astounding and incomprehensible caution that exceeds logic, common sense, and even trickery.”

Then he steels his face and glares at Seiya.

“But all that has changed is the order in which you die! I will just take care of the goddess after I bury you!”

“F-Father! Don’t do this! This... This is...!”

The father points the tip of the black sword at his daughter as she tries to approach.

“Stay back, Rosalie! If you get any closer, I won’t even show *you* mercy!”

“B-but why...?!”

Rosalie is stunned, not by the emperor’s tremendous power but by the fact that she was betrayed by someone she loved and respected. She withers and falls to her knees. The emperor turns to Seiya in an amused manner as if his daughter doesn’t even exist.

“I was a dreamer in my younger years, but I was never able to become the world-saving Hero I so longed to be. That’s why nothing could bring me more joy than fighting you.”

He poises himself, pointing the God Eater at Seiya.

“Seiya! Watch out! That sword can kill not only me but you, too! It can break your soul!”

“The goddess speaks the truth. If I destroy your heart or brain with this sword, then your soul will cease to exist, leaving you unable to return to your world. So? How does it feel to fight an enemy on even footing for the first time?”

The Warmaster tries to intimidate Seiya, but the Hero simply grunts.

“Hmph. If I win, none of that matters.”

In his free right hand, Seiya unsheathes the platinum sword-plus as well.

“Mode: Double Eternal Sword...!”

He holds the blade aloft in his left hand while taking a medium stance with

the sword in his right. As the Hero gets ready to attack, the emperor smirks. However...

“Mn... Gwah?! Ahhh!”

The emperor suddenly begins moaning in agony, slamming the God Eater on the ground to hold himself up like a cane.

I-is he having one of those blackouts?! We’ve got him! Once that happens, it will literally be like stealing candy from a baby!

However, even while in excruciating pain, the Warmaster maintains his self-deprecating smile.

“Heh-heh... This pathetic, old body is on the verge of rotting away. However, all of that ends today. If I can relive my glory days, then I would be more than happy to offer this soul to the Demon Lord...”

The emperor pulls something out of his pocket and pops it in his mouth. Immediately, a black aura begins oozing out of his body.

“The Demon Lord bestowed this Demon Spirit Orb unto me along with the God Eater. In return for changing humans into demons, it can reverse the body’s aging and restore its youth...”

The emperor’s body transforms as he speaks. His white hair changes into a pale azure, similar to Rosalie’s, and the wrinkles on his face gradually fade. Muscle begins growing on his feeble, skinny arms and legs...and the once eighty-something-year-old emperor transforms into a young man of around twenty.

“Heh... Ha-ha-ha! I can feel the power running through my veins! I have returned to my prime—no, I have become stronger than ever!”

As he roars with booming, bloodcurdling laughter, I notice he now has fangs, and his eyes are glowing red.

I use Scan on the demon Warmaster and check his status.

WARMMASTER WOHLKS ROSEGUARD

LV: 90

HP: 359,985 MP: 0

ATK: 302,225 DEF: 293,664 SPD: MAG: GRW:
257,511 0 789

**Resistance: Fire, Water, Lightning, Ice, Earth, Holy, Dark, Poison,
Paralysis, Instant Death, Sleep, Status Ailments**

Special Abilities: Darkness’s Blessing (LV: MAX), Evolve Attack (LV: MAX)

Skills: Style: Evil Light, Crush Evil Light, Massive Evil Light

Personality: Valiant

...His attack is over three hundred thousand?! That’s even higher than the last general, Eraser—by a lot! The sable aura radiating from the emperor’s body swallows the God Eater, transforming it into darkness itself.

From having swallowed the Demon Spirit Orb, the emperor obtained the powers of darkness. He raises his sword high into the air.

“S-Seiya... Huh?!”

Unlike me, Seiya isn’t cowering but instead charging right at him!

“Now’s my chance.”

He immediately uses Double Eternal Sword, but the Warmaster manages to defend with the God Eater. However...

“Mn...! What strange movement. What manner of swordsmanship is this?”

Eternal Sword defies what’s possible for the human arm—and Seiya is dual wielding. Although the emperor may have astonishing stats, he seems to be desperately struggling to defend against such high-speed attacks of afterimages, which create yet more afterimages.

“Don’t push your luck, boy!”

Arcing his sword in a wide swing with all his might, the emperor knocks the Eternal Sword strikes away. However, the unbelievable power of his own strike causes the emperor to clumsily stumble.

Seeing how overpowered the emperor is makes me realize what Seiya meant when he said, *“Now’s my chance.”*

O-ohhh! The emperor still isn’t used to his body after suddenly restoring his youth!

After the Warmaster loses his balance, Seiya begins attacking with Double Eternal Sword once more. The emperor is gradually pushed back by Adenela’s special move. Even as a bystander, Seiya’s advantage is evident. Just one more push, and the emperor’s guard will be broken—or so I think. He suddenly breaks his silence.

“Double Eternal Sword—an awe-inspiring technique that rivals or may even surpass Eraser’s six-weapon strikes. However...”

The emperor’s eyes continue to darken until they’re a cardinal red.

“I have seen all you have to offer.”

Immediately, a trail of black light comes into view, knocking the platinum sword-plus out of Seiya’s hand and onto the floor.

“Take this! Style: Evil Light!”

Black geometrical figures are drawn in the air. Seiya, with only one sword, faces the emperor’s incredible attack that not even Eraser could withstand using six arms.

“Seiya...!”

The moment I scream, I hear Seiya’s bones violently creak.

“...Eternal Sword EX.”

The Adamantitor in Seiya’s left hand moves as if it is tracing the black light of the emperor’s blade. All I can hear is the continuous sound of the Adamantitor deflecting the God Eater’s attacks grating in my ears.

I-is that the Ultimate Eternal Sword?! That's the move Adenela used against Thanatos! Since when does Seiya know that?!

The emperor marvels at the sight, as do I.

"I'm impressed you were able to block my attacks with a single arm. I see. It all makes sense. Small wonder that you have gone undefeated up to this point. I'm sure you've never even been in trouble in any of your fights until now."

Yep! Seiya is the most talented Hero in the world, after all! And he's about to slice you to ribbons, too! Right, Seiya?

Thinking that to myself, I glance at Seiya's profile and gasp. On his cheek is a fresh wound leaking onto the floor.

I-is that blood?! Was he not able to entirely fend off the Evil Strikes?!

I notice sweat mixed in the blood, dripping down Seiya's face.

"The Demon Lord once told me the Hero is summoned from a world without wars or struggle."

The emperor then stares fixedly at Seiya with his crimson eyes.

"You are a boy from a peaceful world. While you have talent, you do not know pain. So allow me to show you a real fight where your flesh shall be torn and your blood spilled."

The Risks and Rewards of Caution

With the God Eater resting on his shoulder, the emperor waits for Seiya's next attack, his face full of confidence. Fortunately, since there are no follow-up attacks, Seiya is able to take the Special Medicine out of his breast pocket, rub it on his cheek where he was cut, and heal his HP.

The emperor had the upper hand in that last exchange. I am struck with the feeling that this will be a fight against the odds, unlike anything we have faced so far—and I am sure that Seiya feels the same way.

“Seiya! Use the techniques of destruction! I'm sure you'll be able to win if you use the moves Valkyrie taught you!”

“No, those moves wouldn't work well against another high-speed swordsman.”

“But...!”

“At any rate, the emperor's attributes rise the more he fights. I need to end this quickly.”

Seiya heaves a deep sigh.

“I was saving this for the Demon Lord, but...”

After placing the Adamantitor down where he can easily grab it, Seiya removes his platinum mail's brassards.

“Huh...? Seiya...? What are you doing?”

Under his armor are a few bracelets around his forearms. Seiya takes one off and drops it to the ground. *Clang!* The cathedral's floor cracks open.

J-just how heavy are those bracelets?! He has been fighting with those on the entire time?!

Seiya continues removing the bracelets one by one.

Wait. I think I've read a story about something like this before! The character shackled their body and held back their true attack power and speed!

After removing over ten bracelets on his right arm, Seiya begins taking off the ones on his left arm as well. After unburdening himself of over ten shackles on that arm as well, he sheds the ones around his right ankle. Then he moves on to the left ankle. I feel a sense of relief after he finally takes off all forty-plus weights...until he reveals there are several around his upper arms, too. Watching the endless loop of him removing the bracelets, I finally snap.

"Just how many of those do you have on?! Does the phrase *Okay, that's enough* even exist in your vocabulary?!"

By the time he removes every last one, a mountain of bracelets and anklets stands on the marble floor.

"This is insane! There is no way equipping this many is even possible! What is this, some kind of magic trick?!"

But Seiya just continues to ignore me. Then he holds his hand out to Mash.

"Hand me my spare platinum sword-plus in the bag."

"C-coming right up!"

Mash hands him the sword. Holding the spare in his right hand and the Adamantitor in his left, Seiya touches the tips together in a mid-stance.

"It will put a huge burden on my arms, but...it appears I don't have a choice."

An aura of light begins rising from Seiya's body and swords.

"Mode: Double Eternal Sword EX...!"

He's going to use Ultimate Eternal Sword with two swords! Plus, he should be stronger and quicker now that he's taken all those weights off! He'll definitely be able to defeat the emperor's Evil Strikes now!

With clear amusement, the emperor asks:

"Are you ready?"

But Seiya shakes his head.

"Hold on. I have a little something extra for you since you waited so long."

In a flash, roaring flames engulf the two swords in Seiya's hands!

"It's a combination between Ultimate Eternal Sword and Phoenix Drive. In other words..."

After swinging the flaming swords around as if he were putting on a demonstration, Seiya points them right at the emperor.

N-no way! He combined Ultimate Eternal Sword with another one of his best moves?! Th-this is undoubtedly going to be the Hero's strongest move!

While I watch with bated breath, Seiya says:

"Mode: Double Eternal Sword EX Phoeni— Let's do this!"

What the...?! Not only is the name too long but he didn't even finish saying it! B-but fine! Whatever! At any rate, go get him, Seiya! Show him who's boss!!

Thereupon, Seiya closes in on the emperor at lightning speed, thanks to taking off the weights. Even then, the Warmaster reflexively blocks one of Seiya's swords with the God Eater! However...the other flaming blade is heading right for the emperor's throat!

"Style: Evil Light!"

A black light shoots out of the Warmaster's sword, deflecting Seiya's first sword before the emperor immediately uses the God Eater like a shield to protect his neck from the incoming strike. Thereupon, the Warmaster takes the offensive once more, creating a geometric pattern in the air. However, Seiya's dual flaming swords are already drawing the same pattern! The scarlet from the fire magic and the black from the dark magic mix and clash multiple times in the air. With each strike, the speed of their swords increases until my vision can no longer keep up. Their attacks go beyond the scope of human intellect...until Seiya's scarlet flames eventually begin spreading out as if to swallow the darkness of the emperor. The Warmaster slowly retreats.

Y-yes! Seiya's pushing him back! Seiya's Mode: Double Eternal Sword (omitted) is slightly outdoing the emperor's Evil Light! But when I glance at Seiya's face, sweat is streaming down like a waterfall.

He's sweating so much! Seiya must be more serious than ever!



For the first time, it is evident that this battle will not be easy. What's more, Seiya said a little earlier that he had no choice but to use this move. In other words, if, by chance, this special attack doesn't work, then...

In spite of my fears, the emperor's shoulder guard is knocked off! Then the flames of Phoenix Drive scorch the emperor's now-bare left arm!

He...he can do it! Seiya can win!

A ray of hope shines in my heart when...

"Marvelous. You are stronger than any warrior or monster I have ever faced. However..."

The sable light instantly carves an even more complicated geometrical pattern in the air, which slowly begins eroding Seiya's flames.

"I have seen all you have to offer."

Next, Seiya is the one being pushed back by the emperor's awe-inspiring swordsmanship!

"Oh? What is this? It appears your movement is getting slower. All out of tricks?"

The Warmaster's lips curl upward like hooks.

"An incredibly talented man like you only appears once in a hundred, no, two hundred years. However, you are no match for me now that I am a demon; hence, you are no match for the Demon Lord, either."

But Seiya is breathing too heavily to respond. This is the first time I have seen Seiya in so much pain.

I am no longer able to stand back and watch. I approach Elulu, then shake her tiny shoulder.

"Elulu! Use Quick! Use your support magic and help Seiya!"

But Elulu shakes her head as if she's in pain.

"I can't...!"

"Wh-why?! Now's the time to make use of your support magic!"

“I already used Quick! Seiya’s really cautious, so he made me cast it on him before we came inside!”

“Wait! So all this is even with Quick already cast?!”

Elulu gazes up at me, tears welling up in her eyes.

“Ristie! Everything’s going to be okay, right?! Seiya’s going to be okay, right?!”

“O-of course! I mean, Seiya—”

Seiya said he was perfectly prepared!

I catch myself midsentence and gasp.

W-wait! He didn’t say he was perfectly prepared this time!

The instant I realize that, I feel like I’ve been stabbed in the back with an icicle.

S-so wait. Seiya, does that mean you don’t know whether or not you can win?!

The bad feeling lingering in my heart worsens every time I see Seiya driven back by the emperor.

“R-Rista, I’m going to help him! We have to save Master Seiya!”

When Mash suddenly yells out, I look over at him to find steam rising from his body. Before long, scales begin covering his arms and legs, transforming him into a dragonewt...but his transformation doesn’t end there. Mash’s body continues expanding, slowly reaching the cathedral’s ceiling. While smaller than the Great Mother, Queen of the Dragons, he is still five meters in total length. After he awakens as a dragon, I use Scan.

MASH

LV: 21

HP: 139,544

MP: 0

ATK: 91,578

DEF: 83,333

SPD: 61,496

MAG: 0

GRW:

67

Resistance: Fire, Water, Lightning, Ice, Poison, Paralysis, Instant Death

**Special Abilities: ATK Boost (LV: 8), Dragonewt Metamorphosis (LV: 9),
Dragon God Metamorphosis (LV: 1)**

Skills: Dragon Claw

Personality: Brave

W-wow! He'll have no problem backing up Seiya with stats like those!

As if seeing Mash head out to fight lit a spark in her...

"Allow me to join you."

Rosalie draws her sword.

"It is my duty to stop that demon!"

Just as they start to head over to battle...

"No. Stay back," Seiya orders, despite desperately defending himself against the emperor's combination attacks. Mash hesitates for a moment, but Rosalie continues to advance. That's when...

"Stay back! You'll be killed!"

Rosalie freezes as if her body's gone completely numb when she hears Seiya's cry. Mash and I are startled as well. Then, as if to capitalize on the brief moment that Seiya directed his attention at us...

"Crush Evil Light!"

Holding the God Eater high into the air, the emperor swings it straight down. Seiya swiftly twists his body, managing to dodge the sword itself as it hits the marble floor, reducing it to dust. But the shock wave caused by the impact sends Seiya flying. After rolling on the floor, Seiya tries to get back to his feet,

but his staggering legs won't let him. My heart audibly hammers against my chest as the Warmaster slowly approaches Seiya, struggling to stand.

Seiya! This isn't happening, right?! You've got a secret weapon you're saving, right?! Right?!

But Seiya's dispirited expression and gasping don't look like acting. The emperor fixes Seiya with a piercing, cold glare.

"I am sure you managed all this time without hardship, nestled within the comfort of your prudent cage of precaution. But now is the time to unmask your true nature."

Seiya wreathes the platinum sword-plus in his right hand in flames as if mustering his last bit of strength.

"Phoenix Thrust...!"

He tries the same special move he used to bury the invincible Dark Firus, but the Warmaster sneers.

"Pathetic!"

He swings his sinister blade with a roar, and it passes right through Seiya's right arm before Phoenix Thrust can even reach the emperor. I can't believe my eyes!

Still holding on to the platinum sword-plus, Seiya's right arm soars through the air, spewing out fresh blood.

"Noooooooo!"

As Elulu lets out a shrill cry, the Warmaster laughs.

"The sense of pain and the fear of death shall be your downfall! How does it feel to be in a *real* battle?"

I-it's over! The emperor is right. Seiya has only been in battles where he has been thoroughly prepared and couldn't lose! There's no way he can bear the excruciating pain of losing an arm!

As if to deal the final blow, the emperor swings the God Eater toward Seiya's skull... The situation is so hopeless that only darkness lies ahead. Everyone else

is sure of the emperor's victory and Seiya's demise as well.

...But there is a flash of light. A powerful slash from the Adamantitor grazes the bridge of the Warmaster's nose.

"...What?"

The emperor takes a step back in bewilderment. Not even I can believe what I'm seeing. Seiya has lost one of his arms. Fresh blood drips from his wound... and yet, he stares fixedly at his opponent indifferently as always.

"It's as if...nothing has changed..."

The emperor cannot even comprehend why he didn't get the reaction he was searching for...but eventually, he smiles.

"You only have one arm! You have no chance of winning!"

"...I'm not the only one with one arm," Seiya mutters. "The Technique of Destruction is about to trigger."

Out of nowhere, as if someone simply dropped their belongings on the floor, the Warmaster's right arm falls to the ground from the elbow down!

"M-my arm...! When was I even hit?!"

"The Ninth Valkyrja: Counter Break—a specified part of the body acts as a catalyst and returns the damage taken back to the opponent."

"That means...you let me cut off your right arm..."

"Having some lag until it actually triggers is a drawback, though."

"Heh-heh-heh... It appears I underestimated you."

It's a bizarre sight to see. They don't seem to mind the great volume of blood gushing out of their wounds. It's as if they've completely abandoned the sense of pain.

While both only have one arm, there is a crucial difference between them. The Warmaster's right arm is lying on the ground with the God Eater in hand, and Seiya's right arm with the platinum sword-plus is no different. But Seiya has *two swords*. He points the Adamantitor in his left hand at the unarmed emperor.

...The God Eater is vital if he wants to kill Seiya. The Warmaster lowers his posture, reaching out for the fallen sword with his left arm. Seiya uses this opening to get closer to the emperor when...

“You fool! I may not have the sword, but I still have my fist!”

Out of nowhere, the Warmaster unexpectedly counters with his fist. This is the difference in experience between them—a gap that cannot be filled—or so it seems at first.

I have no idea how he can remain so calm after losing one of his arms. Seiya narrowly dodges the roaring punch as if he sees it coming while simultaneously piercing the Warmaster’s gold armor using the Adamantitor with Phoenix Thrust.

“Gwa...ha...!”

Even as the flaming sword penetrates his chest, the emperor utters: “I—I don’t believe it... But how...? You fight like a warrior...who has come face-to-face with death countless times...”

The emperor then lifelessly drops to his knees before collapsing to the floor. After deeply exhaling, Seiya tries to head our way, but he falls face-first after a few steps.

“S-Seiya...!”

“Master Seiya!”

“Seiya!”

When I rush over, Seiya gazes up at me with a look of utter exhaustion.

“Rista, heal my arm. The Special Medicine won’t work since it’s been completely severed.”

“Of course! You’ll be all better before you know it! Mash, go get me Seiya’s arm!”

“O-okay!”

I immediately begin casting a healing spell. First, I focus on clotting the blood. While healing Seiya with all my might, I take a peek at his face. He’s tired, but

he's as calm as usual.

"H-hey, uh... Seiya? Doesn't that hurt?"

"Of course it hurts. But humans supposedly pass out when it really hurts, and seeing as I'm still conscious, I guess that means it doesn't hurt that badly."

"Uh-huh... W-well, I just—I can't believe you're holding up so well. I mean, when you got a little scratch from Thanatos, you were begging me to hurry up and heal you. This whole time I was thinking you were as mentally strong as a block of wet tofu."

"Absurd. The reason why I always want to immediately replenish my HP and MP is because it lowers the possibility of the enemy defeating me."

"O-oh! That makes sense! Anyway, I'm so glad you're okay! I was really starting to think you were a goner!"

The moment I let out a sigh of relief...

"Wahhhhhh! It hurts! It hurts!!"

A husky, tearful voice radiates. The emperor transforms back into a white-haired old man as he regresses mentally into an infant as well. He holds his chest and cries. Even though I have only stopped the bleeding, Seiya stands up, pushing off his only arm, then approaches Rosalie.

"Do something. Your dad is crying."

"Th-that's not my problem! That man is no longer my f-father!"

Seiya responds to her stubborn reply with a "hmph" before returning to me.

"Rista, heal that geezer's wounds."

"A-are you sure?"

"He won't shut up, and it's annoying me. He won't be turning back into a demon, and even if he heals somewhat, he's no threat to me."

"Well, Seiya... If you say so."

I perform some emergency treatment on the emperor's pierced chest and arm with my healing magic.

“Sniffle... Thank you, nice lady... Sniffle...”

After relieving the emperor of his pain, he wipes the tears from his eyes and smiles. I whisper to Seiya: “Hey, Seiya, I healed his injuries, but...”

The flames of life are fading within him. Moreover, he used the Demon Spirit Orb to forcibly reverse the flow of time for his already withering body, thus worsening his condition. Seiya approaches Rosalie one more time as she looks away.

“The geezer doesn’t have much time left. Go be by his side.”

“Don’t make me repeat myself! That man isn’t my father! That is nothing but a monster that sold his soul to the Demon Lord!”

Immediately...

Slap!

“Wha—?!”

The palm of Seiya’s hand echoes throughout the cathedral as it connects with Rosalie’s cheek. Clutching her face, she yells: “H-he tried to kill not only the goddess but you as well! To put it bluntly, he tried to destroy the world! He has shamed our nation!”

Smack!

“I—I don’t care how many times you slap me! I won’t be there for him during his final moments!”

Seiya pummels Rosalie’s stubborn cheeks with countless slaps.

Slap! Smack! Slap!

It’s as if he is trying to reenact the slapping incident at Olga Fortress.

“Grrr...!”

As vicious strikes begin turning Rosalie into a “dog” yet again, Seiya says to her: “He won’t be able to hear your growls after he’s dead. Say what you need to say to him while he’s still alive.”

The way he phrased it was terrible, but this is just Seiya’s way of expressing his sympathy... At least, that’s what I think. A grandfather, a grandmother, a

father, a mother—I don't know what happened to Seiya, but perhaps he's lost a loved one in the past as well.

“Grrr...! Mn...!”

Covering her swollen cheeks with tears running down her face, she looks at Seiya with disgust before reluctantly walking over to her father. With distant eyes, she looks down at her father, but...

“Wosalie... I love you so much...”

Looking at her father's innocent smile, Rosalie can no longer bear it, so she drops to her knees and takes his wrinkled hand.

“Father... You are such a fool... You are such a big fool...”

“I'm sorry, Wosalie... I'm sorry.”

The tears just flow down her cheeks.

“It's okay...! It doesn't matter anymore...!”

Weeping, Rosalie directs the emperor's hand toward her head.

“Will you please rub my head...? Just one more time...?”

“Okay, Wosalie... I wuv you... I wuv you so much...”

But the hand limply drops before reaching his daughter. The emperor takes his last breath before he can pat her head.

“Father...”

Rosalie weeps until she can weep no more.

A Slice of Life

After his battle with Seiya, it is announced that Emperor Wohlks Roseguard has died of old age. A small funeral is quietly held by the people of the castle. We spend our time in a room Rosalie prepared for us during those events until three days have passed.

Although the mourning period has ended, we still remain in the castle... because Seiya is unable to move. The moment we walked into our castle room, Seiya said he was going to rest a bit, but he hasn't woken up since.

I take a seat at the end of Seiya's bed. As I gaze at his refined features, I reflect on it all. Mere moments before the emperor was about to kill me, there was the Hero, ever the gallant knight, showing up to save my life. I mean, I'm sure he did it for the exact reason he claimed. He won't be able to return to his world without me unless he commits suicide, so he didn't have any other choice. But even then...

"Thank you, Seiya."

As I place a fresh wet towel on his forehead, Elulu and Mash enter the room.

"Hey, Ristie. How's Seiya?"

"He's still sleeping."

"Man, is he gonna be okay?"

"He'll be fine. I completely healed his severed arm with my magic, and he's in good health as well."

"Then, Ristie...why won't he wake up?"

"He's probably mentally exhausted."

"Makes sense. That battle was intense..."

That's when I hear a knock at the door, and Rosalie comes in.

“The Hero still hasn’t woken up?”

Those are the first words to come out of her mouth as she stares down at Seiya in the bed. It’s been two days since we last saw Rosalie. It’s no surprise, though. She’s been busy with her father’s funeral, taking care of the remnants of Eraser’s army, and making arrangements to become the next emperor. Nevertheless, she probably doesn’t even know how to feel right now. Seiya is the one who drove her father to death. My heart is racing just thinking about what she’ll say to Seiya when he wakes up. All of a sudden, Rosalie speaks.

“I don’t think it was the strong father I loved...but the caring father.”

Rosalie gazes at Seiya with innocent eyes.

“If I hadn’t taken my father’s hand on his deathbed, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. I am very grateful to the Hero who told me to be by his side.”

She turns her attention to me and smiles.

“Feel free to stay at the castle as long as you like.”

And with those words, Rosalie leaves the room.

“Hey, Ristie... Don’t you think Rosalie has changed somewhat?”

“Yeah, a lot has happened lately. She’s probably grown up a little.”

“So wait. Rosalie’s gonna be the next emperor—or I guess I should say empress, right? How badass is that?”

“I bet she’ll be a wonderful ruler.”

I smile at the two of them.

“Rosalie said we could stay here as long as we’d like, so...how about you two go play in the city?”

They’re completely floored by my suggestion.

“What?! And leave Seiya like this?! He still hasn’t even woken up!”

“Ha-ha! That’s exactly why you should go play. Once Seiya wakes up, you’re going to be extremely busy with training and fighting! That’s why you should have fun while you can!”

“Y-yeah, I get that, but...”

“You two wanted to go to the casino, right?”

Like holding a carrot in front of a hungry horse, I entice them. Their cheeks turn red, and they awkwardly nod.

“Then go! Hurry before the training addict wakes up!”

“R-Rista...”

“Don’t worry about a thing, Mash! Leave it to me! I’ll cover for you if this overly serious, overly cautious Hero decides to wake up!”

“R-Ristie...”

“Don’t look so gloomy, Elulu! I know you’re worried that Seiya might get mad, but it’ll be fine! After all, I am a goddess, while Seiya is a mere human! Rank-wise, I’m above him! In fact, he’s basically subservient to me!”

I confidently prattle on, using the fact that he’s sleeping to my advantage. But Elulu and Mash are still acting weird for some reason.

“Th-that’s not it, Rista...”

“Ristie... B-behind you...”

“...Huh?”

I timidly turn around.

“Who are you calling a servant?”

Seiya is firmly standing up out of bed with his arms crossed.

“Hyaaaaaa?!”

Shiiiiiiit! H-h-he’s going to punch me, isn’t he?! He’s going to punch me and kick me and crush my boobs!!

But surprisingly, he doesn’t do a thing. He simply takes a seat on the bed.

What? He’s not going to attack me? Th-that’s impossible! I bet he’s really gonna let me have it later!

“I’m glad you’re all here. Let’s discuss how we’re going to tackle this Demon Lord...”

I slap my hands together, since Seiya started talking.

“Listen up, everyone! Lord Seiya is speaking!”

Mash gives me a quizzical stare as I kiss up to the Hero.

“Yo, Rista... What happened to the casino?”

“What?! This is no time for casinos! We’ve got work to do! Has your brain decomposed and turned into a mushroom, too?!”

“B-but, Ristie, you said we could go play...”

“Don’t be ridiculous! I said no such thing! I would never even imply such a thing!”

They pierce me with their icy glares as I lie my ass off, but I’m desperate. I really don’t want him to squish my boobs again.

“...Who cares about that? Now let me talk. To tell the truth, I was barely able to defeat the emperor. This is something that really needs to be reflected on. I need to train even more for the next battle, against the Demon Lord.”

This is more or less what I expected to happen, but it’s not just me who’s relieved. Mash and Elulu also look somewhat reassured.

It is Seiya, after all. I’m sure he would never just go recklessly rushing into the Demon Lord’s lair, but...

I nod deeply, expressing my agreement.

“Train as much as you’d like, Seiya! If the Demon Lord really does have a horrifying magic item like Chain Destruction, then I’m sure Great Goddess Ishtar won’t mind you staying in the unified spirit world long-term!”

“All right. Then...”

Seiya starts to get up. Elulu and Mash grab their packs without even being told to, and I get ready to open a gate to the spirit world. But Seiya...sits back down on the bed.

“But, well...I guess it could wait. Taking a break might not be so bad every once in a while.”

““““What?””””

Our jaws drop in unison. We stare at the Hero in bewilderment for a while after that.

“S-Seiya...? What was that?”

“I said we should relax a little. Looking back on it, we’ve spent every waking moment training and fighting. I’m honestly a little tired.”

“O-oh... So you mean like two hours or so?”

“No. Resting for two or three days shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Th-that long?!”

Mash timidly queries:

“Th-then it’s okay if we go play during our break?”

“Of course. You’re free to do whatever you want.”

With upturned eyes, Elulu asks:

“D-does that mean we can go to the casino, too?”

“Sure, if you want.”

“Really?! Yay!”

Elulu and Mash bounce up and down, happy as can be.

“Hey, Seiya! If you have time, then let’s play together for a bit!”

But as usual, Seiya coldly states:

“I need all the time I can get to search for ingredients to use in synthesizing.”

“O-oh, okay! Yeah, I figured!”

Elulu’s expression clouds over slightly. However, after a few moments of silence, Seiya lowers his gaze and softly mutters: “But...I guess having a little fun from time to time wouldn’t kill me.”

““Whaaat?!”” Mash and I shout simultaneously.

Did he just say “fun”?! Never in a thousand years did I expect the day to come where I would hear that word come out of his mouth!

Seiya stands, then suggests:

“Let’s meet up here again tonight. Then we can all go out and spend some time together.”

After temporarily parting ways with Seiya, the three of us leave the castle and take a stroll around the capital.

“Man! I can’t believe Master Seiya said that!”

“Right?! I was so surprised!”

They’re beaming with joy. I was being self-conscious when we were in the castle, so I’ve kept my mouth shut up until now, but...

“Hee-hee-hee... Heh-heh-heh...”

I no longer need to hold back the mirth roiling in my stomach.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

With a long stride, I reach out for the heavens and roar with laughter, making Mash and Elulu jump.

“R-Rista?! What’s gotten into you?!”

“Y-you’re scaring me, Ristie!”

“Can you blame me?! How could I not be excited about this?! That berserker has finally said himself that he wanted to have some fun! At long last, it’s time for our slice-of-life moment!”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“You don’t know, Mash? Normally, whenever you’re on an adventure, you always have a slice-of-life moment to enjoy somewhere. Like, while on a boat, or in the mountains, or by the river, or in a hot spring, or wearing a swimsuit, or something lewd—there’s always some sort of development to take your mind off the action!”

“U-uh... Really?”

“Yes, really! And yet, all we’ve been doing is training, training, training, fighting, fighting, fighting, fighting! I was getting sick of it! So, guys, let’s have some fun today!”

Elated, Mash announces:

“Then to the casino we go!”

But I move my index finger back and forth like a pendulum and stop him.

“Casinos are places you go at night. Besides, we shouldn’t enjoy the main dish without Seiya. Let’s do a little warming up until then!”

I check out Elulu’s clothes.

“I-is there a problem, Ristie?”

“Elulu, you can’t wear a lame robe like that while we’re out having fun.”

“But...this is all I have...”

I pat her on the shoulder.

“I’ve got money, and it’s burning a hole in my pocket! We better go out and spend it!”

“What?! Really?!”

“Of course! You’re coming, too, Mash! I’ll pick out some cool clothes for you!”

“Seriously?! All right!”

Raising my fist into the air, I yell:

“Who’s ready to have some fun?!”

““Yaaaah!!””

There’s a clothing store on the corner of the main street. Inside stands a female shopkeeper who looks around thirty years old. She welcomes us with a bow.

“Wow! This is sooo cute!”

“This leather vest is freaking cool, too!”

Exploding with curiosity, Mash and Elulu gawk at the clothes on display. It makes sense, though. In smaller towns, the only clothes you’ll find are either very simple or folk costumes, but this is the capital. There’s a robust selection of fashionable clothing.

One outfit in the corner catches my eye. At first glance, it looks like underwear, but it appears to be using a special material that won’t become see-

through in water.

“Oh, hey... Is this a swimsuit?”

But the beach is really far away from here... I’m surprised they sell these. When I ask the owner about it, she cheerfully smiles.

“That swimsuit’s for the capital’s hot springs.”

“Huh?! There are hot springs here?!”

“Orphée is famous for its hot springs. Many people, even from other nations, come here just to enjoy the mixed baths.”

Mixed baths...? Like men and women together?! Like Seiya and me together?!

Pant... Hff... Pant... Hff... Unnoticed by all, I start breathing heavily.

Ah...! My brain...! It’s going to explode!

I become more interested in the bathing suits than anything else, and I silently begin rummaging through them in pursuit of the perfect one.

“Hey, Ristie, what are you doing?”

Elulu and Mash walk over.

“Swimsuits! The lady said there were hot springs here! Pick out your favorite!”

And just like that, all three of us begin looking through the swimsuits. There are bikinis, or “two-piece swimsuits” as they call them in Seiya’s world. In fact, there is a large variety of swimwear, but all the designs are lame. Incidentally, the clothing shop in the unified spirit world goes beyond what’s popular in the human world. The clothing to be found there can be described as nothing short of spectacular. Gaeabrande, on the other hand, is still a developing world. It’s a land of swords and sorcery. While totally understandable, the difference is staggering from my point of view.

“These bathing suits are hideous... Hopefully, I can find something at least halfway decent.”

The moment I utter that, I notice the owner standing right beside me.

Ack! Did she hear that?

But she simply smiles. Thank goodness. It looks like she didn't hear me. The shopkeeper then approaches Elulu and shows her a peach bathing suit.

"This is a two-piece bathing suit. The top and bottom are made from different pieces of fabric. I bet this would look wonderful on you."

She holds the suit over Elulu's clothes.

"Wow! This is really cute! I think I might go with this one!"

It's not bad...for swimwear from this world. The shopkeeper suddenly approaches me while I glare at the suit, making little to no effort to hide my condescension.

"How about something like this?"

The owner hands me what appears to be just the bottom half a bikini—no different from a pair of panties.

"Huh? Hey, um... Where's the top half?"

"There isn't one. It's a topless swimsuit."

She wears a sinister grin.

"I'm sure it would look absolutely lovely on you."

H-how rude...! She must have heard me trashing her bathing suits! She's clearly doing this out of spite!

Fuming, I shout:

"This defeats the entire point of wearing a bathing suit! My breasts would be out for everyone to see!"

"Oh, you don't like it? That's a shame. Then how about this?"

The next bathing suit she suggests has a top with fabric covering one side, but nothing more than a few strings on the other.

"This is a single-breast-type bathing suit. It would look ever so charming on you."

I brush the bathing suit away.

"What's charming about this?! Just what do you take me for?! Some kind of

pervert?!”

“I happen to think it’s really fashionable.”

“What part of this is fashionable?!”

“You know the type—people who wear eyepatches even though they can see with both eyes, right? It’s kind of like that.”

“Don’t try to compare a one-boobed swimsuit to eyepatch cosplay! Some people might cover an eye for fashion, but I know damn well there ain’t nobody walkin’ around with a whole titty out!”

“R-Rista, relax! You’re slipping into some kind of accent!”

“D-don’t blame me! It’s her fault for recommending these weird swimsuits to me!”

“There is a bottomless bikini if you would prefer that.”

“...?! Wouldn’t I just be naked if I wore that with the topless bikini?! ...I’ve had enough of this! I’ll search for a bathing suit myself! Mash, you pick out something for Seiya!”

“Oh? Is this Seiya person your boyfriend by any chance?”

“Yes! He is!”

“R-Ristie...! No, he’s not...!”

“Then I have just the thing for your wonderful boyfriend. Behold, an open-flap bathing suit.”

Wearing a vile smirk, the shopkeeper shows me a men’s bathing suit with a huge hole in the crotch.

“Ah...!”

Elulu’s face turns bright red.

“The hell?! Now you’ve gone too far!”

Even Mash is pissed, but I whip out the pouch of gold coins in my pocket and ask: “...How much?”

““““Seriously?!””””

It goes without saying that Mash and Elulu are taken aback, but even the shopkeeper is blown away. My motive for buying this is extremely simple, though.

B-because if Seiya puts this on, then his elephant is going to be on full display and... *Pant... Hff... Pant... Hff... Pant... Hff... Pant... Hff...!*

I pick up the one-boobed bathing suit and hand it to the shopkeeper.

“I’ll take this as well. Now that I think about it, it will probably come in handy later tonight.”

“T-tonight...? Rista?! What’s happening tonight?!”

“I’ll tell you when you’re older.”

The shopkeeper shrugs before letting out a deep sigh.



“Never in my wildest dreams...did I think someone would actually purchase the swimsuit I made when I was blackout drunk.”

She holds her hand out to me.

“You win. I’ll sell you the single-breast swimsuit and the open-flap trunks together at a discount.”

“Thanks.”

We exchange a firm handshake. While comforted by the friendly atmosphere, Elulu and Mash choose their swimsuits and clothes before leaving the store. After that, we wander around the capital, essentially window-shopping. I stare at the item shop in the distance where Seiya said he was going to go, but he doesn’t seem to be there. He probably already went back to the castle to synthesize. We explore the city until we find a marketplace to check out. After messing around, we buy some food and drinks to take back to our room.

The time flies by, and eventually, the sun begins to set.

“All right, you two! Ready to head back?”

Holding bags of food and such in each hand, we make our way back toward the castle in high spirits.

I come up with a plan for tonight while walking.

...First, we’ll hang out at the casino before heading to the bar. Then, after getting a little tipsy, we’ll head to the hot spring! A-after that, we’ll put the kids to sleep while Seiya and I...*eh-heh-heh!* I-it’ll be fine! My brain’s taking the day off today! Besides, he already did it with Valkyrie, so nobody has any right to complain!

I cheerfully say to the castle guards: “Yo! Keep up the good work!”

Then Mash, Elulu, and I stroll on inside. Before long, we reach Seiya’s room, and I throw open the door, and shout: “Seiyaaa! Hey! Sorry for the wait! Let’s get this party started!”

But Seiya is nowhere to be found.

“Hmm? Maybe he went to the bathroom?”

“I dunno. I bet he’s still out shopping for things to synthesize with.”

“Well, I guess we’ll just wait here till he gets back.”

An hour goes by. The scenery outside gradually gets darker.

“He said he’d be back by nightfall, right? I assumed he would be more punctual, but...”

“Hmm... Maybe he just lost track of time while he was shopping? I’m sure he’ll be here before we know it!”

“Yeah, you’re right!”

But thirty more minutes pass after that.

Then an hour...

And no matter how long we wait, the Hero never returns.

A Missing Hero

Worried that something might have happened to Seiya, we head to the item shop where he said he was going. While it's late in the night, the main road of Orphée is bright and full of life. After arriving at the item shop, I ask the owner about Seiya.

"Oh, hey. If it isn't the lady who lost to my herbs... Huh? The man you were with? No, he hasn't been here. In fact, I haven't seen him all day."

"What...? He wasn't here? But Seiya said he was going to buy some items for synthesizing..."

"Hey, Rista? Maybe he went to a different item shop."

"Oh yeah. Excuse me, are there any other item shops around here?"

"There's one on the outskirts of town, but it's got nothing on my shop."

Going to the other item shop turns out to be a waste of time, too. The shopkeeper apparently hasn't seen Seiya. It's no different when we go to the weapons shop or armor shop.

"Let's head back to the castle for now. Master Seiya might already be there for all we know."

We return to the castle like Mash suggested. A far cry from when we skipped to the castle earlier, we now drag our feet with a darkness weighing us down.

"Where in the world did he go?"

The moment my brain switches back on, I get a bad feeling about it in the pit of my stomach. Just as I thought, even after returning to the castle, Seiya is nowhere to be found. I ask around, but no one in the castle has seen him, either.

It's been around three hours since we promised to meet up. While helplessly

waiting in Seiya's room, Elulu suddenly mutters: "Y-you don't think...Seiya went to go fight the Demon Lord by himself, right?"

I swallow my breath, briefly in shock until...

"No, that wouldn't even make any sense! The embodiment of overcautiousness himself? He would never do that! I mean, he was reflecting on how to improve after his close battle with the emperor! So there's no way he would go straight to the Demon Lord after all that. I would bet my life on it!"

Mash agrees with me.

"Yeah, you're right. That wouldn't be like him."

"Besides, the Demon Lord has Chain Destruction! Seiya would die permanently if he lost, which is why he's going to be extra-careful with his preparations!"

"Yeah... I guess you're right... But then...where did Seiya go?"

It's unusual that we can't find him even after all this searching.

I stand and head toward the door.

"Rista! Where are you going?"

"I don't know, but I can't just sit around and wait any longer!"

After opening the door, I rush into the hallway, where I run into the imperial mage Flashika.

"Ah! Flashika! Have you seen Seiya?"

But he hasn't seen Seiya, either.

"Oh? The Hero disappeared right before the final battle against the Demon Lord?"

He places a finger on his chin while pondering, then frowns.

"While he may be the Hero, he is still human. Perhaps he ran away?"

Mash raises his voice in response to Flashika's speculation.

"L-like hell he did! Master Seiya would never run away from a fight!"

"But Madam Rosalie told me the Demon Lord has a weapon that could

shatter the Hero's soul. He seems to still be young, so I wouldn't be surprised if he was afraid..."

"Seiya isn't like that! He's no coward!"

Both Mash and I berate Flashika. I'm pissed. It almost feels like I'm being personally attacked.

"I apologize if I offended you. Please forget my careless remarks..."

After parting ways with Flashika, I give in to my rage and storm through the castle, but what Flashika said replays in my head the entire time.

He got scared and ran away? Th-that's ridiculous...!

Even during his battle against the emperor, Seiya acted like it was nothing. When I saw that, I thought Seiya must be mentally strong as well. But...maybe he was simply putting on a brave front? Maybe he was in so much pain and agony that he couldn't take it anymore and it broke him? Maybe that's even why he slept at the castle for three days...?

The more I think about it, the more pessimistic I become. Then, out of nowhere, a certain thought pops into my head.

"Wait... Did Seiya commit suicide before the Demon Lord could kill him...?"

"Wh-what?! The hell are you talking about?!"

"What do you mean, Ristie?!"

"If the Demon Lord kills him, then his soul will be destroyed! But if he dies outside of the Chain Destruction's range, then his soul wouldn't completely disappear, and he would be able to return to his world! Th-that's why Seiya..."

"Are you saying he abandoned us?!"

"I don't know! I'm just thinking out loud!"

So much for our slice-of-life moment...

I create a gate to the spirit world.

"I didn't want to do this, but we don't have any other choice! We're going to have to ask Great Goddess Ishtar where Seiya is!"

Taking Mash and Elulu with me, I walk through the portal to the unified spirit world...

I appear right before Ishtar's room and then, without knocking...

"I'm coming in!"

I lunge through the door, but the Great Goddess isn't there—and unusually so. Instead, a very familiar goddess stands alone by the window. Ariadoa is gazing out the window with her back to us.

"Aria?! What are you doing here?! More importantly, where's Great Goddess Ishtar?! We're in trouble! Seiya's gone, and we need her to find him!"

Aria slowly turns around as I continue to rattle on. But when I see her face, I am taken off guard, for tears are running down her cheeks.

"A-Aria...?"

Without even wiping the tears away, she says with a dead-serious expression: "Rista, follow me. Ishtar is waiting for you in the Chamber of Eternal Stasis."

Aria, who's usually so talkative, walks through the sanctuary without saying a word, and we follow her, mimicking her silence. There's a heavy feeling in my chest, as if a lump of lead is buried in it. Only when we get to the end of the hall on the third floor does Aria stop.

"This is the Chamber of Eternal Stasis."

I follow her into the room and immediately feel as if I stepped into zero gravity. Slightly up ahead is a desk with Ishtar sitting behind it.

"Rista, children of the dragonkin, thank you for coming. Under normal circumstances, humans would be prohibited from entering this room. However, I will make an exception for pure souls such as yours."

Rows of shelves are lined up behind the Great Goddess. At first glance, it almost looks like a library. Nevertheless, on the shelves are not books but countless objects emitting a pale light. Without even daring to ask, I can intuitively tell that these are our divine souls. The moment I start to open my mouth to ask her where Seiya is...

"Rista, I know what you want to ask me."

The Great Goddess Ishtar, who can see into the near future, solemnly continues.

“Allow me to get straight to the point. Seiya Ryuuguuin left for the Demon Lord’s castle almost immediately after you split up.”

“What...?!”

Mash, Elulu, and I are at a loss for words. A few moments go by before I slightly process what she said and immediately object.

“Th-that’s ridiculous! That overly cautious Hero would never challenge the Demon Lord to a fight without even training! Chain Destruction could destroy his soul, right?! Then why—?”

“Yes, Rista. And it could destroy your soul as well. Seiya Ryuuguuin knew it was possible the Demon Lord could kill you, and that’s why he went to face him alone.”

“...What?”

I can’t understand what she’s saying. I rack my brain, trying to process the information.

“S-so you’re saying Seiya went to fight the Demon Lord...to save me? Ha-ha... ha-ha-ha! That’s crazy talk! Seiya just thinks I’m a pain. He doesn’t even see me as a goddess. I mean, he makes fun of me, punches me, kicks me—”

“He has a sharp tongue and is ill-mannered as well. But even then, Seiya Ryuuguuin is a kindhearted man—much more so than you think. Ever since you summoned him, he has been putting his friends’ safety first.”

“No... That can’t be...!”

Even Elulu and Mash open their eyes wide when they hear this.

“Master Seiya...cares that much about us?”

“Mash, Elulu... Seiya Ryuuguuin refused to take you with him at first solely because he didn’t want to lose anyone. And that’s also the reason why he can be cold and why he refuses to involve you in battle. In some cases, he may even prioritize his friends over his duty to save Gaeabrande.”

The Great Goddess gazes up at the high ceiling, then adds:

“That is why he saved Mash when he was being tortured by Deathmagla, and that is why he couldn’t allow Elulu to become the holy sword at Dragon Village. Furthermore, that is why he protected Rista from the emperor, unconcerned that his own soul might very well have been destroyed.”

“I-it still doesn’t add up! If what you’re saying is true—if he really was worried about our lives, then he could just take us to the spirit world! After that, he could train more than ever!”

“Training any longer would be meaningless.”

“Why?! Because there aren’t any gods stronger than Valkyrie?! He could at least level up to increase his chances of defeating the Demon Lord!”

Ishtar places a hand on the large crystal ball sitting on the desk.

“Rista, Seiya Ryuuguuin has been hiding his status with Fake Out. Allow me to show you his true attributes.”

Seiya’s stats slowly appear within the crystal ball.

SEIYA RYUUGUIN				
LV: 99				
(MAX)				
HP: 321,960		MP: 88,155		
ATK:	DEF:	SPD:	MAG:	GRW:
293,412	287,644	268,875	58,751	999
				(MAX)...

...This might be the first time I’ve had a clear look at Seiya’s stats since the battle against Chaos Machina. His attributes have dramatically increased since then, but I guess that shouldn’t be a surprise.

“H-holy crap!”

“Wow! Seiya’s stats are amazing!”

They gasp in admiration. I mean, his stats are really high, but... But this is...!

“His stats may far exceed those of your average Hero, but even then, they aren’t as good as Warmaster Wohlks Roseguard’s were after turning into a demon. The only reason Seiya was able to defeat the emperor was because he learned one of Valkyrie’s techniques of destruction.”

Mash points at the crystal ball, his hand trembling as if he just noticed something.

“Hold up! ‘MAX’? He’s at...max level...? The hell...?!”

“Yes, he has already reached the maximum level. By the way, this was his status when he fought the Great Mother, Queen of the Dragons, after training with Adenela. His attributes haven’t changed since then.”

Elulu places a hand over her mouth, overcome with surprise.

“H-he was already this strong that long ago...?”

“That is why he focused on learning the techniques for destruction and the magic arrows of light from then on. He was trying to make up for his static attributes with the special moves of the gods. He was very troubled, although it may not have seemed like it.”

“But Seiya never even said a word about that...”

“Because that wouldn’t change the reality of it. Perhaps he felt that it would only meaninglessly worry you all in the end.”

A silence reigns over the room as I clench my fist.

“No...! He can’t...! These stats are nowhere near high enough to defeat the Demon Lord of the S-ranked world of Gaeabrande!”

“B-but Rista...! Master Seiya has Igzasion! I’m sure with that, the Valkyrja techniques, and his abilit—”

“No...! The holy sword...!”

Elulu is listening nearby, but I cannot control the surge of emotions any longer.

“That Igzasion is a fake!”

Mash and Elulu turn as white as snow.

“Y-you’re joking, right?! I thought he crafted one using Elulu’s blood and the Mother Queen’s sword?!”

“The sword he crafted wasn’t Igzasion! He was just pretending it was to prevent a riot at Dragon Village and to protect you!”

“Seriously?!”

“Seiya...!”

Elulu gasps. After we fall silent, Ishtar speaks up in our place.

“He has already stopped growing. He has no sword to defeat the Demon Lord, nor does he have any armor to protect himself from the Demon Lord’s attacks. That’s why he asked Valkyrie to teach him her final attack: a move that cannot be blocked or dodged but at the cost of the caster’s life—the Gate of Valhalla.”

A chill runs down my spine.

“Gate of Valhalla?! But...! But Valkyrie said she wouldn’t teach him that move!”

“Rista, you saw her bestow the aura of destruction to Seiya during the ritual yourself, right?”

The memory of Seiya and Valkyrie holding each other in bed suddenly flashes through the back of my head.

That was a ritual...to grant him the Gate of Valhalla?!

“Even Valkyrie was moved when she saw how Seiya Ryuuguuin would sacrifice his own life to save Gaeabrande. That is why she taught him her treasured ultimate attack...”

“But why...? Why would he...? There is a zero percent chance of survival if he uses Valhalla’s Gate... He wouldn’t be able to return to his world after that... And yet...”

“And yet, Seiya Ryuuguuin went to the Demon Lord’s castle...in order to protect what he couldn’t save before—an illusion of his past.”

“It just doesn’t make sense... Why would he...?”

I yell before the Great Goddess.

“It doesn’t make any sense! Why?! Why would he go that far to protect us?!”

“...There is something I must ask you before I answer that.”

She gives me a sharp stare, nothing like her usual mild-mannered expression.

“Goddess Ristarte, are you ready for the truth?”

The Reason for Caution

The Great Goddess before me wears a dignified expression. But even then, I decisively say:

“I’m ready!!”

Ishtar nods before placing both hands over the large crystal ball on the table.

“Then please have a look. The truth you seek lies here.”

The crystal ball illuminates as if it is responding to her words. Then a moving image appears as if a movie is playing on a television.

...Three people sit around a table: a girl with dark-brown hair dressed as a priestess, a gentle-looking man in a mage’s robe, and...a familiar-looking beautiful woman wearing a pure-white dress. Her hair is longer than it is now, but there is no doubting it. I instinctively look away from the crystal ball and turn around.

“I-is this...Aria...?”

Aria, who has been quietly watching this entire time, slowly walks over to my side.

“This was me one hundred years ago...in the B-ranked world of Ixphoria...”

“‘Ixphoria’?”

I feel like I’ve heard that name before. Right as I try to rack my brain...

“Ready to go?”

I hear a familiar voice coming from the crystal ball, catching my attention. The three people within the crystal ball appear to be gazing in the direction of the voice as well. Only footsteps can be heard as the fourth person approaches them, but before long, he steps clearly into view. The fourth warrior is a tall man wearing steel armor that accents his shiny black hair and very refined

features. Just like with Aria, there is no doubting who this is.

“Seiya...!”

It is none other than the Hero I summoned—Seiya Ryuuguuin.

Aria mutters:

“I summoned Seiya Ryuuguuin to help save Ixphoria.”

Wh-what?! But she has never once mentioned this to me!

The questions spiral in my head. Nevertheless, Seiya continues talking within the crystal ball.

“Let’s go. It’s time to defeat that Chimera.”

Seiya gallantly turns around and starts heading toward the door until the priestess stops him.

“Seiya, wait! We’re still not ready! According to the information I got, the Chimera’s level is still higher than ours! We should train more before we—”

“We don’t have time for that. It would be quicker to just fight it and see for ourselves. Besides, I have a plan.”

“Then tell us what that plan of yours is!”

“The plan is...to do our best. Now, come on.”

“...! Act like an adult! That’s not a plan, you moron! I’m not joking—we should really prepare for this battle before we go!”

The priestess shakes her head, swinging her shoulder-length dark-brown hair as she scolds Seiya. After the tense air in the Chamber of Eternal Stasis slightly relaxes, Aria points at the crystal ball.

“That’s Tiana, the princess of a large country known as Termine and the healer in our group. She joined our party along the way in order to help defeat the Demon Lord.”

The Hero eloquently runs his fingers through his hair. Then, without paying heed to Princess Tiana’s advice, he says:

“Everything’s gonna be okay.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?! ...S-Seiya, wait!”

The Hero leaves the room, refusing to listen and leaving Princess Tiana behind with no idea what to do with her anger. However, the mage in the robe smiles.

“Ha-ha. He never changes.”

“Colt?! This isn’t a laughing matter!”

Aria lets out a bitter laugh along with the mage called Colt.

“Everything will be okay, though...just like things have always worked out until now.”

“Aria?! You, too?! You shouldn’t pamper that reckless Hero!”

...The scene changes, and the crystal ball reveals what happened after that. Seiya and his party are facing a giant lion. Hold up. That isn’t a lion. It has wings on its back and a massive snake for a tail. It’s a chimera!

Standing before the beast...

“Colt! Use your wind magic! Now!”

“I-I’ve been bitten! Tiana, heal me! Help!”

“Colt, relax! I’m going to heal you, so stop moving!”

“Tiana, wait! You need to heal Seiya first! He only has two HP left!”

“What?! ...Seiya! You have a huge hole in your chest!”

“I’m fine. Strangely enough, it doesn’t hurt. In fact, it feels good...like I’m in a dream.”

“That’s because you’re dying!!”

...This is a mess. It’s the furthest you can get from an easy win. After a narrow victory winning by the skin of their teeth, the Hero fist pumps with his trembling arms.

“See? What did I tell you? We won.”

“Are you blind?! Look how beaten up we are!”

“We still won, though, so what’s the problem?”

“Everything! I mean, look at Colt! He’s missing a leg!”

“Ngh... Tiana... Heal me...!”

“All right. Now let’s go get that golem.”

“...?! Did you not hear what I just said?! Colt! Is missing! A *leg!*”

We watch the crystal ball in the Chamber of Eternal Stasis with bated breath.

“Is this really Master Seiya?!”

“H-he’s acting like...Rosalie!”

I can’t help but strongly agree with Mash and Elulu. Seiya’s behavior is no different than Rosalie’s. In fact, he’s being even more reckless than her. While we cringe away from the sight, Aria’s lips faintly curl upward as if she is fondly reliving the moment.

“This is how Seiya used to be. He hated leveling up, and he always wanted to keep moving forward. Even then, he was a gifted fighter. Despite being at a lower level than his opponent, he would somehow win without even preparing for the battle. We had a few crises like the Chimera battle, but we continued to pull through until, one day, we suddenly found ourselves not worrying anymore. And before long, we came to relish how carefree our lives had become.”

The crystal ball then begins to show us a brief montage of their battles. A golem, a dragon, a cyclops—they fight numerous powerful enemies, getting hurt along the way, yet every time, they continue moving forward. They are invariably hairbreadth victories, but for some reason, they always look like they are having fun. This Seiya is far different from the overpowered Hero I know. He relies on his allies, struggles, and barely wins, but they always share the joy of victory together. I’m sure everyone believed in Seiya, and he believed in them.

“We continued in this fashion up until the fight against the Demon Lord.”

As Aria utters those words, the scenery within the crystal ball changes.

It appears to be night. Only Seiya and Tiana sit around the bonfire as they talk.

“Seiya, we’re finally here. All that’s left is the Demon Lord.”

“We head out at dawn, so get some rest.”

“I’m a little anxious. I can’t sleep. Hey...are you sure you don’t want to go to Sage Village?”

“I’m positive. I already have a weapon to defeat the Demon Lord. There’s no reason for us to head all the way over to such a remote village.”

“But Aria said we could find information on the Demon Lord there...”

“Tiana, I want to defeat the Demon Lord as soon as possible.”

The stubborn Hero causes Princess Tiana to let out a deep sigh. She then smiles as if she has given up.

“Seiya, you haven’t changed since the day we met. You never train or prepare for anything.”

Her expression grows slightly serious.

“Can you at least tell me why you’re always in such a hurry? That’s all I want to know.”

“I’ve already told you. I don’t have a reason.”

“Ugh! Don’t give me that! Tomorrow’s the last day of our journey, you know. So please...! Pretty please?”

A brief moment of silence passes before Seiya mutters in a subdued voice:

“The longer it takes us to get there—the longer the Demon Lord lives, and the longer the people of this world suffer. That’s why I have to keep moving forward.”

Seiya scratches his head as if he’s somewhat embarrassed.

“Oh... So that’s why...”

Princess Tiana places her hand over Seiya’s. Then Seiya intertwines his fingers with hers, and they clasp hands tightly.

“Tiana, we were only able to come this far because of your healing magic. I’m sorry for always pushing you so hard.”

“I-it’s fine. We’ll get through it just like we always do. So...say it. Say what you

always say. It helps me relax.”

Gazing up at the sea of stars, Seiya says:

“Everything’s gonna be okay.”

Princess Tiana smiles.

...The scene changes once more. Great Goddess Ishtar stares at the crystal ball. Then, in a serious tone, she mentions:

“This is their battle against the Demon Lord of Ixphoria.”

The new image within the crystal ball shows the Hero’s party riddled with wounds. Battered and exhausted, Seiya’s party surrounds a towering, hideous monster with green skin, a long, torn mouth with fangs peeking out, and a total of eight arms and legs. It’s as if the beast threw away its dignity as the Demon Lord to become a monster whose sole reason for existing was slaughtering the Hero in the most violent way imaginable. This must be its final form. Just like Seiya and his party, the Demon Lord is in bad shape. Purple liquid streams from various parts of its body. With his very last ounce of strength, Seiya holds his sword aloft. A brilliant light radiates from the holy blade as if it is responding to his emotions. Seiya swings the sword with all his might, immediately severing the Demon Lord’s colossal upper body from the waist down. A final roar of agony echoes throughout the Demon Lord’s castle, followed by the cheers of the party. Aria rushes over to Seiya.

“Seiya! You did it!”

“A-are you sure? Is it really dead?”

Princess Tiana is worried, but...

“I checked with Scan! The Demon Lord has zero HP left! You defeated him!”

The princess seems so relieved to hear those words that she listlessly sinks to the floor. Standing by her side, Seiya boasts:

“See? I told you everything was gonna be okay.”

“Does this look *okay* to you?! To say we won by the skin of our teeth would be the understatement of the century!”

Everyone is in high spirits, despite being utterly exhausted. Even the mage Colt is laughing in amusement. However...something red suddenly shoots out of Colt's mouth.

"Huh...?"

Copious amounts of blood trail from his mouth. Not even Colt can make sense of what happened.

...Although only half a body, the Demon Lord's sharp tongue is sticking out of its mouth, piercing Colt's chest like a sword. Princess Tiana screams at the sight of the sudden tragedy.

"Colt?!"

Like a reptilian tongue wrapping around its prey, the Demon Lord reels Colt in in the blink of an eye, and he disappears into its massive maw. The Demon Lord's lower body instantly regenerates as if it used the body as nourishment. Aria's face drains of all color as she trembles.

"Th-this can't be happening! I checked! The Demon Lord's HP was at zero! He was dead!"

After regaining its strength, the Demon Lord swiftly springs out before Aria, then snatches her up in its four hands before laughing in triumph.

"I have two lives. I lost one, but the other is still going strong!"

"Wh-what...?! S-Seiya... Tiana... Run! We can't wi—"

But Aria's warning is cut short. The Demon Lord swallows her as well.

"Heh-heh-heh-heh! Now I can completely regenerate thanks to their nourishment!"

Propping himself up with his sword, Seiya somehow manages to stagger to his feet, but his fatigued legs won't stop quivering.

"Tiana...can you still use your healing magic...?"

"S-sorry, Seiya... I'm out of MP..."

As tears begin welling up in the apologetic eyes of the once-headstrong princess, Seiya places a hand on her head.

“You have nothing to apologize about. It’s my fault for not coming prepared.”

And just like that, Seiya shoves Princess Tiana far away.

“Tiana, run.”

He takes a step forward as if to protect the princess, but the Demon Lord passes right by Seiya and goes after her.

“I won’t let you escape! I’m going to kill this woman first!”

“Stop...”

Seiya tries to rush over to Princess Tiana, but he no longer has any control over his body. He pitifully collapses, able to do nothing but watch the Demon Lord. The monster slowly approaches the trembling princess, then fixes its eyes on her stomach.

“Oh-ho...? Though faint, I can sense a tiny spark of life growing within this woman’s belly...”

Even Seiya, who almost always remains calm, begins trembling. The Demon Lord slowly rotates its hideous head in Seiya’s direction.

“I see! So she’s carrying your child!”

Sensing Seiya’s fear, the Demon Lord sneers.

“I’m going to rip that child from her stomach and devour it right in front of you! This mother and her child will become the first two sacrifices of my new world!”

“Stop... I beg of you...”

The vision in the crystal ball suddenly cuts off.

“...I believe that’s enough.”

It all happens so suddenly that I find myself baffled at first, but I almost immediately understand why Ishtar doesn’t show us what happened next... because to my side is Aria, sobbing inconsolably.

“It wasn’t Seiya’s fault! It was all my fault! If I had sent Seiya to Sage Village to learn the secrets of the Demon Lord, then none of this...! This was my responsibility as his goddess!”

The moment she bursts into a fit of crying, I suddenly remember. Out of the three hundred worlds Aria saved, there was one that she couldn't— It was Ixphoria! Oh...! It all makes sense! Seiya's friends were killed along with the woman he loved and his unborn child...! This traumatic event must be the reason Seiya became so overly cautious!

I calmly try to analyze the situation in my head, but...

"R-Rista."

"Ristie...?"

"...Huh?"

I don't notice until Mash and Elulu call my name. Hot tears are streaming down my cheeks without end.

"Sniffle... Mn...! Ngh...!"

The tears won't stop. I can't breathe. My chest feels like it's being torn apart.

Why? Why am I feeling this way?!

"...Did the memories of your soul awaken?" Ishtar asks with a solemn tone.

"Ristarte... You are the Princess Tiana that Seiya Ryuuguuin couldn't save. That was you before you were reincarnated as a goddess."

Th-that princess...was me...? I used to be...a human...? Th-that can't be...!

The Great Goddess continues as if she knows that I won't be able to believe it.

"When you jumped to conclusions and thought that Valkyrie and Seiya were sleeping together, you were furious, weren't you? That's because a faint memory of your love for him is still lingering in your soul."

"Ah...!"

Those words leave me speechless. The sadness, anger, and frustration I felt deep within my heart that day supports the claim that Seiya and I were in love in a past life.

"Thanks to a combination of Aria's fervent desire and Princess Tiana's virtuous conduct, you were able to be reborn as a goddess after death."

Ishtar continues as I stand there in shock.

“A hundred years have passed for you in the unified spirit world where the flow of time is slow. However, only a year has passed for Seiya Ryuuguuin... It wasn't a coincidence that you chose him to save Gaeabrande with you. The two of you were reunited by fate. Of course, Seiya Ryuuguuin doesn't remember his past, either. Not remembering Aria is proof of that. But even then, the regret of not being able to save his loved ones has been carved into his very soul. And he expressed that with a certain word after you summoned him.”

“‘A certain word’...?”

“Do you remember when he said ‘properties’ soon after you met?”

I remember. I was trying to get him interested, so I tried to get him to check his “status”...but he said “properties” instead.

“This is what he saw then.”

I choke up when I see the image within the crystal ball.

“Th-this is...! But...?!”

“He's smart. He was able to accurately grasp the situation he was in simply by seeing what was written here. He understood he was summoned once before and failed.”

Unable to contain myself any longer, I start creating a gate to Gaeabrande when Aria yells:

“Rista?! What are you doing?!”

“What do you think?! I'm going to find Seiya!”

“Rista, wait! Don't go! I don't want to lose you again!”

Aria grabs my arm and tries to stop me. I hold her hand.

“Aria, thank you so much for everything you've done. But I have to go. Seiya means too much to me. I can't let him go alone.”

“Rista...”

Ishtar faces me with a solemn look on her face.

“Nobody would blame you for backing out now that the Demon Lord has the Chain Destruction. If anything, I recommend that you turn back. I am sure that is what Seiya Ryuuguuin would want as well. Even then, you still wish to go?”

“I’m going! Of course I’m going!”

“...Then it appears there is no use in trying to stop you.”

I quietly nod, then start to cast a spell to specify a destination in Gaeabrande. Seiya—that overly cautious Hero—must have known we would eventually figure out his plan, and he likely took that into consideration before heading off to the Demon Lord’s castle! So there’s no way we’d make it in time if we created a gate around the castle itself!

Ishtar quietly speaks up as if she knows what I am thinking.

“You are planning on creating a gate in the deepest lair of the Demon Lord’s castle where the final battle will take place? I believe that extends beyond the realm of support as a goddess.”

“I don’t care! I’m ready to take whatever punishment awaits me!”

I start walking through the gate when somebody suddenly grabs me by the arm. When I glance back, I see Mash and Elulu looking grim.

“Mash, Elulu, there’s no reason for you two to die as well. If you want to return to Gaeabrande, then have Great Goddess Ishtar send you somewhere safe, okay?”

Mash vigorously shakes his head.

“I want you to think back to what you just said to Ishtar, because that’s how we feel, too! Of course we’re going with you!”

Elulu nods deeply as the tears well up in her eyes.

“Seiya saved both our lives, so if his life is in danger...then we have to go save him!”

There are no words I can say to them as I gaze into their innocent eyes. After all, they feel the same way I do right now...

I quietly nod, agreeing to take them along. But the moment I place a hand on

the gate, Ishtar speaks to me from behind.

“The Demon Lord is using Area Chain Destruction. The magic force it creates makes it impossible for me to see into the future. Therefore, I have no idea what is going to happen after you go through that gate.”

Her voice sounds scratchy at the end, so I turn around to find her staring at me with a deeply troubled expression.

“Ristarte, be careful.”

“Thank you.”

After deeply bowing my head, I walk through the gate.

I'm coming, Seiya. I know I won't be much help even if I'm there, but regardless, I'll be there for you. I won't let you die alone.

For just a brief moment, as I pass through the gate's dimensional vortex, I think back to the message Seiya saw after saying “properties.”

“Be careful. Be cautious. Be overly cautious. You may find yourself alienated or hated, but you have to endure it all. This time, for sure, you'll prove that you can save your friends, your loved ones, and the entire world.”

Even I...

The moment I exit the gate, I find myself in the abyss—a darkness with neither skies nor land. As a chill runs down my spine, I can feel it in my bones. I am inside the Area Chain Destruction.

“Wh-what is this place?!”

“I thought this was supposed to take us to the Demon Lord’s castle?!”

Elulu and Mash wail in surprise. I made a gate to take us to the final battle within the Dark Lord’s castle. That part I am sure of. This must be the Demon Lord’s magic. He must have covered the area in darkness to give himself an advantage during the battle. Inside the transformed throne room, I see a pale aura, glimmering as if it is humanity’s last glimmer of hope within the darkness.

“Seiya...!”

The Hero is facing off against the Demon Lord several dozen meters up ahead. Clad in armor and in human form, the Demon Lord of the S-ranked world Gaeabrande confidently stares down the Hero. Neither of them seems tired. It looks like the battle just started.

I made it in time...but my relief is short-lived. Seiya places his left hand over his right before pointing it at the Demon Lord. I tremble at the sight of his stance.

Th-that’s Valkyrie’s final attack! Thirty seconds after using that move, the blowback will kill him!

“Seiya, wait! Stop!” I scream as I rush over, but my voice doesn’t reach him.

He fixes a piercing glare on the enemy before him. Then...

“Omega Valkyrja: Gate of Valhalla!”

His dignified voice cuts through the darkness, immediately followed by a

colossal gate that appears along with a white miasma over his head. In a flash, the Demon Lord, who has been facing Seiya, is nowhere to be found. The black gate opens while releasing the mist, soon revealing that the Demon Lord has already been sucked through. As blood drips down the face of the gypsum goddess, she bursts into laughter.

“Gi-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh!”

The Demon Lord is unquestionably shocked by the Goddess of Destruction’s unavoidable, ultimate technique.

“What?! But I put up an Anti-Magic Field around the area...!”

“Techniques of Destruction aren’t magic. That’s why they can be used regardless of the circumstance.”

“Techniques...of Destruction...?”

He struggles to free himself from the gate, but the countless spikes attached to the inside of the doors shatter his armor and pierce his body. The Demon Lord turns pale as he sees the black blood dripping down his arm.

“A weapon other than the holy sword Igzasion can pierce my flesh? Such a material, no, such an ability exists?!”

The human body of the Demon Lord suddenly begins warping and becoming more demonic in appearance. His eyes turn red as his mouth splits open, baring sharp fangs. At the same time, his bulging, dark-red arms latch on to the gate’s doors, trying to force them open as they close around him. Even then, the power of the Gate of Valhalla exceeds that of the Dark Lord. Even the God of Death, Thanatos, was unable to withstand its power. However, the Demon Lord’s body begins to transform. The armor around his body shatters as robust arms appear beneath his other arms. With six arms, just like Eraser, the Demon Lord tries to wrench open the door while bloodying his limbs. But...what I see next is something I wish was a dream. The Gate of Valhalla is slowly being overpowered by the Demon Lord’s brute strength!

Voices trembling, Elulu and Mash cry out.

“Th-this can’t be happening!”

“He’s gonna escape!”

My body quivers at the unbelievable sight.

B-but...! Seiya risked his life to use that move, and yet...!

Once half of the Demon Lord’s body has been pulled free, he sneers with his widely split mouth.

“Don’t you dare underestimate me...human...!”

But in the next moment, the Demon Lord’s expression stiffens! The Hero is floating right before his eyes. He had already used Flight and is right before the Gate of Valhalla, assuming a combat stance with sword in hand!

“I never underestimated you, Demon Lord of the S-ranked world Gaeabrande. I figured you were capable of at least this much.”

Seiya widely draws back the Adamantitor, wreathed in flames.

“Phoenix Thrust!”

He thrusts his sword toward the demon’s chest with the same move that pierced the emperor’s golden armor, but it clinks as if metal were hitting metal. It looks like Igzasion really is the only thing that can cut through the Demon Lord’s flesh! But even then, Seiya tries to force the demon back into the gate with all his might!

“Your sword cannot hurt me! Don’t think your strange moves can seal me away, either!”

The Demon Lord’s roar echoes. After pulling his body even farther out of the gate, he swings one of his six arms right into Seiya’s stomach. Unable to even defend, Seiya is sent flying back at an incredible speed.

“Gwah...!”

He somehow manages to stop himself before regaining his footing, but he immediately vomits blood.

“Master Seiya!”

“Seiya!”

They scream his name, but Seiya simply wipes the blood from his mouth with

his arm before taking flight once more. He is prioritizing trapping the Demon Lord inside the gate over healing his wounds. After getting into position with his sword, Seiya's joints begin to creak...

"Eternal Sword EX!"

The Hero uses Adenela's ultimate attack. However, the Demon Lord laughs at him.

"You fool! I told you that your moves are useless against me!"

The continuous strikes wash over the Demon Lord like rainfall, but he doesn't even bother to defend himself. He simply continues focusing all his strength on pulling himself out of the gate... However, after the sword touches the Demon Lord, the sound of flesh being sliced echoes along with the appearance of numerous cuts all over his upper body.

"A sword that's not even Igzasion...is cutting into my flesh?!"

The Demon Lord scowls in the face of the puzzling phenomenon. Even I have no idea what's going on!

H-how?! How is that working when Phoenix Thrust didn't?!

While continuing the flurry of attacks with one hand, Seiya throws something at the Demon Lord with his other hand, which makes a light crackling sound when it connects. Thereupon, it falls to the ground and into the darkness.

"What was that...?"

The Demon Lord is struck dumb with bewilderment.

"Hmph. It's a Ristarte Hair Doll."

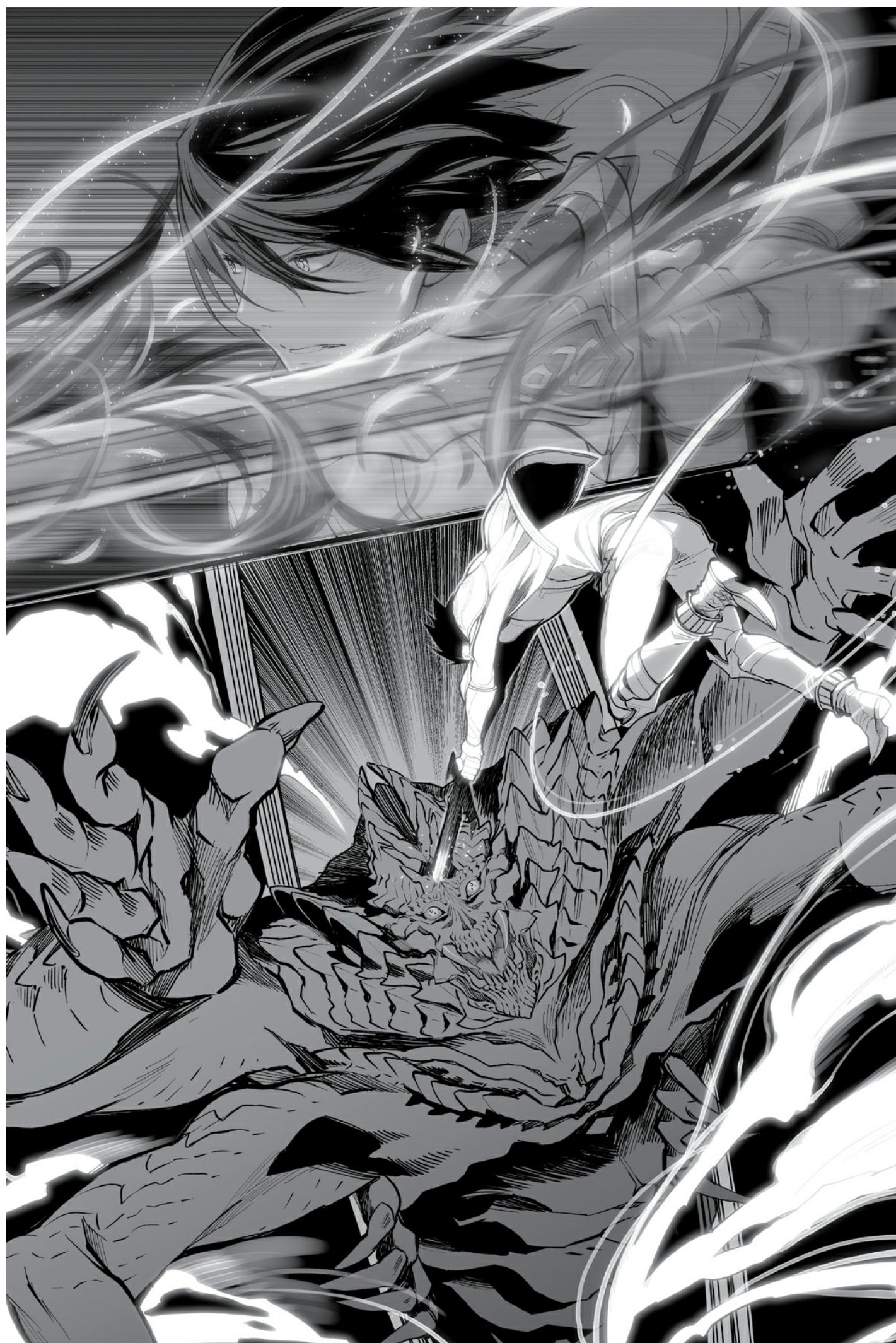
...?! Whaaaaaat?! That's the embarrassing doll I made with my hair! I-is he really going to use that?! And during such a critical moment?! Way to ruin the tension! B-but now I get it! Seiya didn't use Phoenix Thrust to push the Demon Lord back into the gate! It was to stick the Adamantitor inside the gate and synthesize it with the indestructible, all-powerful Spikes of Destruction! The Demon Lord looks at the Hero's sword as it emits a white miasma just like the Gate of Valhalla, then gasps.

"This is the sword born from the realm of death—the Valhalla Blade."

Seiya widely swings the Valhalla Blade back. A peculiar aura, bright like a tangible soul, emanates from the Hero's body, illuminating the darkness.

"Return to the source...! Valhalla Thrust!"

Seiya thrusts the sword with all his might. Bearing light, the blade pierces the Demon Lord's forehead. With a jarring *crack*, the Demon Lord's skull breaks open as his screams echo throughout the abyss. Immediately, his arms prying the gate open lose all strength. Seiya lets go of Valhalla Blade as it sticks out of the Demon Lord's head, then twists his body in the air while unleashing a powerful kick into the sword's hilt. The impact completely knocks the Demon Lord's hands off the doors!



“H-human—!”

“Gi-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh!”

The Demon Lord’s reproachful cries are drowned out by the laughter of the goddess atop the Gate of Valhalla. And just like that...as the gate slowly releases a miasma, the doors slam shut with a booming *thud*.

Mash utters:

“H-he did it...! The gate closed!”

Then Elulu yells:

“Seiya!”

Floating in the air, Seiya unsteadily descends to the surface. Then, like a marionette without strings, he collapses to the floor.

“Seiya...!”

We rush over to him. In addition to the wound the Demon Lord gave him, his entire body is cut and bleeding all over. Thirty seconds have already elapsed since he used the Gate of Valhalla, so his body is starting to break down.

Paying no heed to the blood spewing out of his body, Seiya stares at us in a daze. When I hold him in my arms, he speaks to me in a drowsy voice.

“Rista, you took a shortcut to the Demon Lord’s throne room, didn’t you? What happened to the rules of the spirit world that you were always going on about?”

“You idiot! That doesn’t matter right now! If you die here, you’ll never be able to return to your world!”

“I know. But I defeated the Demon Lord,” the Hero says with an air of satisfaction.

I continue to go off on him.

“If you were truly cautious, you would’ve figured out a way to do it that didn’t involve killing yourself in the process!”

Usually, he would say something back or hit me, but Seiya’s ravaged body can

no longer do even that. He simply remains silent...until his eyes close heavily. The pool of his blood on the ground already suggests that it's too late.

"Seiya...!"

"Master Seiya...!"

Elulu and Mash cry as they shake his body, but he's unresponsive. In just a few more seconds, the Gate of Valhalla will take the rest of Seiya's life force as compensation.

In the midst of their screaming and crying...

"I won't let you die...!"

Mash and Elulu look up at me with bloodshot eyes.

"Who said you could die anyway?! What's your problem?! You said you'd be back by nightfall, you liar! We were supposed to go to the casino, then have a drink, then go to the hot springs where I'd show you my funny bathing suit... There are still so many things I want to do with you!"

After pelting the Hero with my words, which he probably couldn't even hear anymore, I scream in a voice loud enough to shake the darkness of the abyss.

"Order!"

Then I pray to the Great Goddess Ishtar of the unified spirit world.

"Please grant me, Goddess Ristarte, all my divine healing powers!"

"Ristarte, you have already violated the rules of the spirit world by warping yourself to the scene of the final battle."

The powerful voice resonates throughout my entire being, as if the Great Goddess Ishtar is speaking directly to my soul.

"Ristarte, what you have done has already conflicted with the rules of the spirit world. Not even I will be able to protect you any longer if you continue violating them. You could be tried by the innermost layer of the spirit world and lose your title as a goddess."

But with firm resolution, I reply:

"It's fine. I'm prepared for whatever happens. Besides..."

I continue with such a tranquil tone that I surprise myself:

“I believe this moment is the reason why I became a goddess in the first place.”

After a few moments of silence...

“Very well. I will grant you the full extent of your divine powers...”

Ishtar’s voice radiates.

Then...

“R-Rista?”

“Ristie?”

Mash and Elulu are astonished. All of a sudden, a blinding light wraps my body like a sun wrapped in darkness.

I’m sure that my regret for not being able to save you in my past life is what granted me this power. Just you wait... I’m going to show you just how superior my divine healing powers are to the destruction wrought by the Gate of Valhalla.

I tenderly caress Seiya’s blood-streaked face.

Because this time, even I...

“I’m perfectly prepared!”

Happy Ending

Seiya continues losing blood at an alarming rate, as if he is being cut by countless invisible blades. I place a hand over his body. The moment I touch Seiya's skin with the light pouring from my palm, the wound instantly heals. However...

"Rista, this is bad! The wounds just keep appearing no matter how much you heal him!"

Mash is right. New cuts keep emerging as if to counter my divine powers. But even then, there is still a chance I can save him. The Gate of Valhalla's recoil damage doesn't last forever. Valkyrie proved this when she used Order to increase her vitality to prevent paying the ultimate price. If I can keep the damage from going past a certain point with my healing, then I should be able to save him.

I lay Seiya in my lap, then continue to heal him while making sure to focus on his brain and heart. I've already used so much healing energy on Seiya that I would have run out of magic long ago if I were human. Elulu gives me a worried look.

"Ristie... Are you okay?"

"Don't worry. I'm fine."

Elulu smiles. It isn't all talk, either. This divine energy, far different from magic, is endlessly flowing from the depths of my body. There is no concept of anything like MP to express it in numerical form, for this power is eternal.

I can save him. I will save him. We're going to have a happy ending this time. Right, Seiya?

I don't know how much time has gone by. In a way, it feels like an eternity and yet also as if no time has gone by at all. As the wounds appearing on Seiya's

body begin decreasing, Mash's and Elulu's faces radiate with hope. I continue concentrating on healing without letting my mind wander. And eventually... fresh wounds stop showing up.

"Is it over? Rista?"

I give Mash a nod.

I tell him that the trade-off for using the Gate of Valhalla is over. However, Seiya still doesn't open his eyes. Their faces are racked with concern as they watch over him. But after completely unlocking my divine powers, I can feel a faint hint of life coming from Seiya. And before long, he slowly opens his eyes.

"I... I'm still alive...?"

After hearing the Hero speak, albeit in a daze, Elulu and Mash hop up and down with joy in their hearts.

"Master...!"

"Seiya! Thank goodness! Thank goodness you're okay!"

Thereupon, they look up at me with admiration in their eyes.

"Ristie, you're amazing! I can't believe it!"

"You're such a badass, Rista! You're like a goddess!"

"...?! Because I am a goddess!"

Seiya gazes up at me as his head rests in my lap.

"You saved me?"

"Yes..."

The corners of my eyes start to burn. The man I loved most when I was human is going to live.

"Seiya..."

I lift Seiya's head up and bring my lips closer to his.

...And he immediately places a hand on my forehead, pushing me back and rejecting my kiss.

"What?! B-but... Hey! I...! Why?!"

“That’s what I want to know. What do you think you’re doing?”

Seiya swiftly rises to his feet, then turns his head away from me.

“S-Seiya?! You don’t need to feel embarrassed! I’m the love of your life! It’s me, Rista, who you love so, so, sooo much! So it’s fine if we kiss!” I shout while trying to embrace him, but he grabs me by the arm and pushes me back.

“Stop. Get away from me. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I won’t stop! I won’t get away from you! Now kiss me! Goddess’s orders!”

“Cut it out! I’m going to punch you.”

“That’s not going to fool me anymore! I know you’re just trying to hide how you feel! But in reality, you love me so much you sacrificed your life to protect me!”

WHACK! An unbearable pain shoots through my head.

“...Owww!”

Blood gushes down the side of my head. I place a hand over where I was punched by the abnormally strong Hero.

“I-I’m bleeding...!”

“I told you I would punch you.”

The Hero’s gaze is ice-cold, and I can no longer control my faintly trembling body.

“Did you seriously have to hit me that hard?! I won’t be able to resurrect if you kill me here, you know!”

“Good.”

“Th-that does it!”

Ishtar, are you sure?! Was I really the love of Seiya’s life?! People treat their garbage better than he treats me!

While I regret breaking the rules of the spirit world to save him, Seiya scratches his cheek with a finger.

“But, well...good job healing me in spite of the circumstances.” Seiya then

looks at me while smugly saying, “All right, allow me to promote you from low-level off-brand herb to mid-tier potion.”

“...?! I can confidently say that doesn’t make me happy one bit!”

I can’t help but feel disheartened after fantasizing about a passionate embrace and kiss. Elulu suddenly tugs at my arm as I stand there, unsatisfied with our happy ending.

“Ristie... Why is...?”

“I-I’m sure he’s just embarrassed! In reality, he really cares about me—about us. I’m sure of it...”

But anyway...it’s time to shift emotional gears! After all, the Demon Lord is dead, and I was able to save Seiya! So I’m going to count this one as a win!

But Elulu keeps tugging at my arm.

“No, Ristie... Not that...”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“Why...is the...?”

Elulu then screams in a shrill voice:

“Why is the Gate of Valhalla still here?!”

Startled, I look in the direction of Elulu’s trembling finger, and just as she said, the Gate of Valhalla is still eerily floating in the air. At the very least, the gate is tightly shut, so there doesn’t seem to be a problem, but...

“Gi-geh-geh... Guh-gah-geh... Gi-goo-geh...!”

The goddess’s face on top of the gate contorts in agony. Then, with a deafening screech, the Gate of Valhalla flies wide open! The demon’s skull is shattered by the Valhalla Blade, its body torn to shreds and broken down by the Spikes of Destruction and the underworld’s miasma—only bones and chunks of flesh are left...and yet, the Demon Lord extends his skeletal arm toward us. A dark light shines in the palm of his hand.

“If I must perish, then I’m taking you all with me! The end of the world is now! ...Judgment Zero!”

...It all happened in the blink of an eye. After regaining my true powers as a goddess, I was instantly able to sense the power of the Demon Lord's attack—unfortunately so. The dark light in his hand has the power to split the world in two. All life on Gaeabrande will be reduced to ash without even feeling pain... including us. The moment the Demon Lord starts casting his ultimate attack, I suddenly think to myself: *Even at a time like this— No, maybe it's because it's a time like this, I feel at peace for some reason.*

Sigh. After all that, we're going to lose? This turned out to be a lot different than the happy ending I envisioned. I guess if there's one thing I can be happy about, it's that I get to die with the one I love... Wanting to burn the image of Seiya's face into my memory one last time, I look back...

And I find myself even more surprised than when the skeletonized Demon Lord crawled out of the Gate of Valhalla.

"It's over, Demon Lord."

...Not once did he let his guard down or relax. It was as if he knew this would happen—as if he realized the battle wasn't over yet! The overly cautious Hero already has his left hand on his right wrist, aiming it at the Demon Lord! Before the demon can even cast his final attack—before I can even yell out "Stop!"—Seiya casts the final Valkyrja attack once again with no concern for his life, as if he were simply throwing it in the garbage despite miraculously being saved.

"Gate of Valhalla: Encore!"

Thereupon, another Gate of Valhalla appears over Seiya's head while releasing more miasma. Atop the gate is the face of a dignified god! And inside the gate...

"No...! I must kill you before I go...! Human...!"

The Demon Lord has already been captured, spewing out his resentment. He tries to unleash the dark light, but the first Gate of Valhalla comes back to life! The Demon Lord is dragged into the gate from behind, arms and all.

"Guhaaa! Hee-hee-hee-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

With his lips twisted widely from ear to ear, the god's face on the gate cackles in a maniacal frenzy as blood drips down his chin. The gate swallows the Demon

Lord, dragging him into its depths along with the first Gate of Valhalla. With a violent clatter, the doors to the second gate slam shut. Instantly, Judgment Zero goes off inside, and the intense explosion causes the doors to swell and protrude. Although the gate warps, the doors still do not open.

...Time goes by, and a deep silence reigns over us all as we stare hard at the new gate with bated breath.

“I-is it over? I-is it really over...this time?”

A deep voice echoes from above as if to answer Mash.

“Guhe-hee-hee! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! You can relax now! I swallowed him along with the first Gate of Valhalla!”

“Th-the gate’s talking?!”

Trembling, Elulu falls back on her bum.

“Guhe-hee-hee! Heh-heh-heh-heh! He has been destroyed and returned to nothingness!”

All of a sudden, the bloodstained goggling eyes of the second gate turn in Seiya’s direction.

“Now, it’s time to pay up, caster! Your life belongs to me!”

“I—I won’t let you have it!”

I walk over to Seiya as he stands completely frozen.

“Don’t worry, Seiya! I’ll save you again!”

I was able to save him once, so I’m sure I can do it again!

I start casting my healing in preparation, but...

“...Huh?”

No cuts or wounds appear on Seiya’s body. Instead, his cheek starts to crack.

“Wh-what’s going on?! This is different than last time...”

I touch his cracked cheek, immediately healing it. But his arms, legs—every part of his body starts to crack. No matter how many times I heal him, another part of his body begins to crack until they spread all over his body.

A-am I not going to make it in time?! His body is being destroyed faster than I can regenerate it!

The second gate laughs at me as I panic.

“Guhaaaa-ha-ha-ha-heh-heh-heh! I hope you don’t think a pathetic human can avoid paying the ultimate price twice in a row!”

“Sh-shut up! Silence, you!”

Faster... Faster...! I have to heal him faster than he’s being destroyed...!

I pour all my focus into healing, but even then, the countless cracks only continue to spread.

I scream to the god on the gate:

“Don’t do this! Stop! Seiya saved this world! Don’t do this to him!”

But the god’s vile laugh drowns me out.

“Gu-hee-hee-hee-ha-ha-ha-ha! I am the Gate of Valhalla! Neither god nor demon, I am an agent of the realm of death! The trade-off is just and will be collected as such!”

A white mist spews out...before the Gate of Valhalla abruptly disappears from the abyss. Elulu shakes my shoulders.

“Ristie! Create a gate to another world! If we get away from the Chain Destruction, then...!”

Mash backs Elulu up.

“Y-yeah, if we do that, then Master Seiya will just return to his world even if he dies!”

Even then, I cannot even take one step away from Seiya. The awe-inspiring aura of destruction is swallowing his body.

“I can’t...! If I stop healing him for even a second, then he’ll shatter!”

“Wh-what?!”

Despite our hysteria, the Hero calmly stares at Elulu with his usual composed expression. Seiya then begins to speak as if he were making small talk.

“Elulu, thanks for helping against the emperor.”

“S-Seiya...?”

“I probably would have died then if I hadn’t had your support magic.”

“No...Seiya...! Because you saved me—because you didn’t turn me into the holy sword, you...! That’s why I...!”

Seiya looks to Mash next.

“Mash, now that the Demon Lord and the four generals are dead, there’s probably no one left in this world who can defeat you. Work together with Rosalie and protect Gaeabrande.”

“Master Seiya...! No...! I still haven’t even gotten the chance to pay you back yet...!”

The dragonkin children weep with stifled voices. That’s when I face everyone and yell: “Enough! Stop talking like that! Listen, I am going to save you! I am going to save you no matter what!”

I tightly embrace Seiya with both arms in order to unleash all the power I have. But even then, his skin only continues to crack. The small crevices soon give rise to large fissures that spread across Seiya’s entire right leg. And before long, his right leg falls to the ground and shatters like glass, causing him to fall to one knee.

“Why?! Why isn’t my healing working?! Why...?!”

My cries soon turn into shrieking. Seiya then whispers into my ear: “It’s okay, Rista.”

“No, it’s not okay! This is not how it’s going to end! I wasn’t able to save you then, so I became a goddess! So not again...! I can’t...”

I suddenly feel something warm touching my back... Seiya is gently holding me in his arms.

“Rista, you’ve already done more than enough.”

Tears immediately well up in my eyes. I tightly hold Seiya back with everything I’ve got.

“I wasn’t able to do anything in the end... Even after becoming a goddess, I was useless. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I was such a terrible goddess...”

Seiya gazes at my tearstained face.

“It’s strange. This feels so familiar for some reason.”

Seiya’s expression suddenly changes, then he wipes the tears running down my cheek with his finger.

“Oh, you’re... So that’s why I...”

Seiya smiles with his hand still on my cheek. This is the first time I have ever seen him smile.

“I’m so glad I was able to save you this time.”

Seiya’s hand falls off my cheek before his face limply drops onto my chest.

And just like that...

The love of my past life...and the overly cautious Hero I summoned...shatters into dust in my arms.



FINAL CHAPTER

Crime and Punishment and One More Thing

A contingent of soldiers are lined up in the throne room of the castle. Empress Rosalie Roseguard rises from the throne, approaches me, then looks at me with an air of sorrow.

“...Do you really have to go?”

Her words seem to come not from a place of duty but out of genuine concern.

“The Demon Lord has been defeated, and Gaeabrande has been saved thanks to you. Normally, I would grant you a nation and offer you a reward of some sort...”

I softly shake my head.

“Don’t worry about it. Besides...the one who contributed the most to the Demon Lord’s defeat...is no longer with us...”

Rosalie starts to say something, but...

“Yes...”

As if to swallow the words welling deep within, she nods a few times before casting a serious gaze at me.

“Let me just say this. No matter what others thought about him, Seiya Ryuuguuin always fought for what he believed in. He was a true Hero. I know that now.”

I look Rosalie right back in the eyes.

“Yes. And everything he did was a series of miracles that no other Hero would be capable of.”

I walk over to Mash and Elulu, who are standing behind Rosalie. Mash is wearing the armor of an imperial knight, and Elulu is dressed in beautiful noblewoman attire. Rosalie invited the two dragonkin to join the imperial

knights for their contribution in saving the world. It was Seiya's final wish as well, so Mash agreed. Elulu also decided to stay by Mash's side.

I reach out to shake Mash's hand.

"Mash. Good luck."

"Rista..."

Mash takes my hand with a serious expression, then says: "I will protect this world that Master Seiya saved..."

He already looks so much more grown up than he did only a few days ago. Mash firmly squeezes my hand.

"I know you can do it."

"I'll be here with him to keep him in line!"

Elulu giggles by his side, causing Mash to seem somewhat embarrassed. Neither Rosalie nor I can keep our lips from curling upward.

"Elulu, be there for Mash, okay?"

"I will!"

Her reply is full of energy, but now there's a sorrowful hue to her expression.

"Ristie... You're really leaving, huh?"

"Yes... I have to go."

Elulu immediately throws her arms around me.

"Come visit us sometimes...okay?" Elulu requests as she gazes up at me.

"Let's go to a hot spring next time, okay?"

Mash sends me a smile as well.

"Yeah! We still haven't even gone to the casino yet!"

I smile right back at them.

"Yeah, you're right. We have to go next time."

"It's a promise then, okay? We're going."

"Sure. One day."

I tightly embrace Elulu. Then...

"I have to go now. Take care."

I let go of Elulu, then search for an empty space in the throne room before casting the spell. I create a gate to the spirit world and start to walk inside when...

"Goddess Ristarte."

Rosalie suddenly calls my name.

"You're strong. I still haven't come to terms with my father's death."

"I'm not strong. But...I have to become a better goddess for Seiya's sake as well... That's how I feel right now."

"I have a lot to learn from you. As the ruler of this nation, I must become a vessel fit for my role."

"You'll be fine. More importantly, look after Mash and Elulu for me. Please don't make them do anything reckless, okay?"

"I won't."

Rosalie smiles at Elulu and Mash, and they smile back. Seeing that lets me know they're going to be okay, and I place a hand on the gate.

"All hail the Goddess of Salvation!"

Rosalie's voice echoes from behind, and the soldiers stomp the ground in unison. Listening to their calls in the background, I part ways with Gaeabrande...

The portal leads me to my room in the unified spirit world. After closing the gate, I quietly stare at it for a while. I send my heart out to the world beyond it once more and bow before finally making it disappear. Taking a seat at the end of my bed, I think about Mash and Elulu when they saw me off. They were so grown up. When did they get so strong? All of a sudden, Seiya's confident expression appears right before my eyes.

Hmph. As I expected.

"Seiya..."

But when I reach out to touch him, the illusion immediately disappears. All

that's there is a lonely, empty space.

Ristarte, you're strong.

I firmly shake my head as I think back to what Rosalie said. Then I get off the bed and lock my door. Nobody will bother me in here. Nobody can see me. That's why I don't have to hold back anymore.

...I collapse on the bed, then start bawling my eyes out like a small child.

I continue to ignore the rapping at the door and don't even touch the food slid under it. Two days pass. As usual, I keep blocking out the knocking until I hear a *ker-chk* accompanying the door opening. Aria stands in the threshold, having opened my chambers with her seal-breaking ability.

"I'm sorry, Rista. But the Great Goddess Ishtar is calling for you."

"...Okay... I'll be right there."

I sluggishly sit up and get out of bed, and Aria grins slightly when she sees my face.

"Oh my. You look terrible, and your hair is a mess."

She takes my hand, despite me not even reacting.

"Rista, come here."

She walks me over to the dresser in the corner of the room. Then, without saying a word, she starts combing my hair.

"...Perfect. Now you're beautiful again."

When I look into the mirror, my hair seems to be in good shape, but my skin is rough and some exhausted-looking woman is staring back at me.

Aria places a hand on my shoulder and stiffens her expression a little.

"Rista, I am positive that Great Goddess Ishtar is going to talk to you about taking responsibility for unlocking your goddess powers."

As she regards me solemnly, I say indifferently:

"That's fine. I'm perfectly prepared to accept any punishment I'm given. After all, I'm at fault."

The graceful words I spit out don't match how I really feel. After losing him, I don't care what happens to me anymore. Whether I'm scolded, severely punished, or even lose my goddess status—it doesn't matter anymore. If anything, I would be thankful for some punishment if it could change how I feel right now.

But with a face set with determination, Aria says:

"Don't worry. You saved the S-ranked world Gaeabrande. Your punishment won't be severe."

While following Aria down the hallway, I run into the Goddess of War, Adenela. Slouching as always, she bobs over to me.

"R-Rista, a-are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm hanging in there."

I try to force a smile onto my face, but I'm not confident it works.

"What about you? You really liked Seiya as well."

"F-forget about me, Rista. I h-heard everything. Y-you're the one in the m-most pain right now."

I find myself having trouble answering until I hear a barbarous voice coming from my side.

"Yo, Rista! I don't know what happened, but you look down! How about trying some of this! I'm sure it will make you feel better."

The Divine Blade Cerceus holds a cake out to me on a plate.

"I decided to make an ice cream cake for a change! It's nice and cold—and delicious, of course!

Adenela glares at Cerceus with heavy bags under her eyes.

"Th-this is not the t-time for something like that. A-are you stupid o-or something...?"

"Huh?! Wh-why?!"

Cerceus is taken aback. I feel a little bad for him, so I pick up the fork and take a bite. I don't taste anything. I'm sure it's actually delicious, but my tongue has

lost its sense of taste.

But even then, I smile at Cerceus, who eagerly awaits my opinion.

“This *protein cake* is delicious.”

“...! It’s *ice cream cake*! There isn’t any protein powder in it!”

“Oh, sorry. *Frozen protein*, yes?”

“No! That would just be protein powder frozen in the freezer!”

As Cerceus freaks out, Adenela takes the fork and holds it up to his neck.

“Eeeeeep!”

“Sh-shut up! Th-there’s protein in this cake! R-right?!”

“Y-yes, of course! I poured a whole bag of protein in the batter!!”

It actually didn’t taste like anything, though. However...

“I think it would taste even better if you put less protein in it.”

After giving Cerceus some ridiculous advice, I continue on ahead without them.

Aria and I walk into Ishtar’s room. She is sitting in her chair as usual, but her expression is somewhat stern.

“Rista, congratulations on saving Gaeabrande. I am very happy you returned home safely. However, regardless of how I feel, you violated the rules of the gods. Therefore, you are to receive an official notification from the innermost layer of the spirit world. You must take responsibility for your actions.”

She speaks with an air of dignity, but nothing I hear connects with me. It doesn’t even seem real—as if it has nothing to do with me.

Aria, on the other hand, changes colors.

“Great Goddess Ishtar! I understand what you’re saying, but Rista saved the S-ranked world Gaeabrande! You should at least consider that when deciding her fate!”

A few moments of silence pass before the Great Goddess continues: “Rista’s punishment will be...saving the SS-ranked world Ixphoria.”

“What...?!”

Aria is speechless.

“I-Ixphoria has already been conquered by the Demon Lord! After defeating the Hero, the Demon Lord turned it into a netherworld with his newfound powers! Trying to save that world now would be...!”

Aria freezes, but Ishtar goes on.

“Therefore, Rista, I will be sealing your divine healing powers during your journey to save Ixphoria. Then, if you are unable to save the world, you will be permanently stripped of your goddess title.”

“To make matters worse...that world is already a source of trauma for Rista...”

Aria slams her hand against the desk as if she can’t bear it any longer.

“This is too much! If you seal her divine powers, she won’t even be able to support her Hero! There is no way she’ll be able to save such a frightening world like that!”

This is the first time I have ever seen Aria so straightforward with her feelings. But Ishtar replies in a carefree tone: “I wouldn’t be so certain about that. I do not think it’s impossible at the very least.”

“What are you basing that on?! What kind of Hero could save a world that has already fallen into the hand of the demons?!”

Great Goddess Ishtar slowly gets out of her chair, then glances over the courtyard outside the window.

“When the second Gate of Valhalla swallowed the Demon Lord...it devoured the effects of Chain Destruction along with it.”

Unable to grasp what she is trying to say, Aria asks: “Wh-what exactly do you mean?”

“Usually, there is no returning to fallen worlds. However, this will be an exception.”

After the Great Goddess turns around and picks up a piece of paper on her desk, she walks over to me.

“Ristarte, I will allow you to summon a Hero from this list to take with you on your journey to the SS-ranked world of Ixphoria.”

The moment I take a glance at the Hero list, I immediately wake up from my daze.

SEIYA RYUUGUIN

LV: 1

HP: 385 MP: 197

ATK: 124 DEF: 111 SPD: 105 MAG: 86 GRW: 188

Resistance: Fire, Ice, Wind, Water, Lightning, Earth

Special Abilities: Fire Magic (LV: 5), EXP Boost (LV: 2)...

His stats have been reset and are now one-thousandth of what they once were. But even then, there is one thing on his résumé that hasn’t changed.

The moment I see that, the tears begin flowing again.

...It’s a power granted by past regrets.

...It’s a power that defeated the Demon Lord and saved the world.

...It’s a power that protected me and our allies.

Written at the very end of his status.

PERSONALITY: OVERLY CAUTIOUS

(Gaeabrande Arc—Fin)

AFTERWORD

Thank you so much for reading Volume 2 of *The Hero Is Overpowered but Overly Cautious*. It is I, the author, Light Tuchihi. My name may be spelled 土日月, but it is not pronounced Donichigetsu as some may assume. It's Tuchihi. However, you are free to pronounce my name however you'd like. Oh, um...I talked about the same thing at the end of the first volume, didn't I? So, uh... To everyone who read the first volume, long time no see.

By the way, I had a pleasant surprise after the first volume was published... It was almost immediately reprinted! I've heard stories about reprints, but I never thought I would get to experience one for myself. So thank you so, so much to everyone who bought it!

Now, I would like to explain my outline for Volume 2. But before that, there is something I'd like to say to people who are reading this and thinking, *I liked Volume 1, but I don't know if I should buy Volume 2...* I believe there are no absolutes in this world. But I am confident that if you liked Volume 1, then you will definitely like Volume 2! Therefore, while I know this is pretty shameless, I really hope that those who read Volume 1 will read Volume 2 as well. If Volume 1 is heads, then Volume 2 would be tails. Once you read both, you can finally say that you really read *The Hero Is Overpowered but Overly Cautious*.

Almost all the foreshadowing in Volume 1 is addressed in Volume 2, and the second half of Volume 2 explains why the Hero Seiya Ryuuguuin became so cautious. The enemies are even more fiendish, and the events become more serious the closer you get to the second half. On the other hand, I still believe I filled this volume with even more comedy than its predecessor.

Incidentally, when I wrote this story, I wanted to make it a mix between comedy and touching moments because I myself wanted to read a story that made me laugh a lot and sometimes cry. Therefore, as an author, nothing

would make me happier than if you were able to laugh a little and cry a bit.

Now, I know I touched on the “English” in the novel during the last afterword, but one of my friends pointed out something else strange, so I would like to talk about that this time. In regard to part of the Japanese title, *Ore TUEEE Kuse Ni* (俺TUEEEくせに), he was like, “Dude, I think your Japanese is wrong.” He was telling me that I should add a *no* (の) between the *TUEEE* and *Kuse* or at least a *na* (な). So I told him to shut up and mind his own business. He brought up a fair point. That probably would be more grammatically correct.

And it’s not just with the title. I am sure some of the English terms I frequently use in the novel would make native speakers go, “What the hell...?” I majored in English during university, so honestly, even I know some of it is weird (lol). But I prioritize linguistic sense over the correct meaning of words when I write. *Ore TUEEE Kuse Ni* has a kick to it that *Ore TUEEE No Kuse Ni* doesn’t have, and I think “Ready Perfectly” (レディ・パーフェクトリー / Perfectly prepared) gets the meaning across better than “All set!” Of course, this is all just how I feel as a writer.

...So if you’re reading and find something strange, I just want you to remember (pretend) that this is just one of the author’s unique “properties” (traits).

Now, I would like to end this by giving thanks to the people who deserve it. First, I would like to thank Saori Toyota. Thank you very much again for your wonderful illustrations. The characters are only blurs in my mind until Toyota brings life to them. I especially like the illustration of Valkyrie this time around. She’s cool and came out kind of punky, which really blew me away. Saori Toyota is a veteran illustrator who can really differentiate between serious and comedic scenes. I am truly lucky to work with such talent.

Next, I would like to thank my editor. When the cover was being made for Volume 2, I was wondering how it would turn out and tried imagining it, but I couldn’t even do that much (lol). But I remember when I saw the rough sketch for the cover, I was like, *This is it!* It shows how badass Seiya is in the front... along with another important character—Valkyrie. You can also see an emotional side to Rista as Mash and Elulu give off a comedic vibe. There is so much of Volume 2 squeezed into just one picture. When I heard that it was

none other than my editor who came up with the cover's composition, I was floored. He is helping this story not only through sentence composition but with his artistic sense as well.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who purchased this book. I am already extremely grateful that the story I came up with could be printed, but it brings me unparalleled joy when I think about how this work could be on the shelf at bookstores throughout Japan. I don't think many people just buy the second volume without the first, so I believe most people who have the second volume have the first one, too. So when I think about how two stories I created are somewhere in the world together on someone's bookshelf in their room, I just want to explode with joy aaand...I should just shut up now.

Anyway, thank you so very much! The S-Ranked Gaeabrande arc ends with this volume, but the next story, SS-Ranked Ixphoria, will continue online as well as at KakuYomu. Please wish me good luck and support me in getting the other stories published as well.

And last but not least, I just want to thank everyone once more who made this novel come to life. I am wishing you all the happiness in the world.

Tuchihi

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